



Homily – Chrism Massⁱ

*The Most Rev. José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles*

*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels
April 18, 2011*

Cardinal Mahony, my brother bishops, my dear brother priests and deacons; religious and consecrated men and women, seminarians; all of you, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

This is a special moment of grace for me. This is my first Chrism Massⁱ with my brother bishops and priests, my first co-workers in the apostolic work of building the Kingdom of God here in the great Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

I still cannot believe that I am here. Used to be Cardinal Mahony here and I was over there. And now, it is the other way around. But I feel the strength of the grace of God and your prayers as I start my ministry among you in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

I love this ceremony in which we bless the holy oils — the signs and instruments through which our priests carry out their ministry of salvation.

It is so fitting that we do this during Holy Week. For these signs of divine grace draw the supernatural power they communicate from the Paschal Mystery of our Lord's death and Resurrection that we commemorate this week.

Pope John Paul II used to call this yearly celebration of the Chrism Mass, "*the feast of priests.*"ⁱⁱ That is a beautiful way to think about this celebration.

Pope John Paul II had a big influence on my own priesthood. I am overjoyed, and I am sure that you are too, that he is going to be beatified soon, on May 1.

Tonight, in this "feast of priests" we have a wonderful opportunity for the renewal of our priesthood.

That is why I want to say some personal words to my brother priests about the beauty and the duty of their calling.

But what I have to say about their priesthood speaks to all of you. As we heard in today's second reading, Christ has made his Catholic Church to be a "kingdom, priests to his God and Father."ⁱⁱⁱ

Each of us who has been baptized has a priestly soul. We are called to be holy people. We are called to make our lives something beautiful that we offer in sacrifice to God. We are called to strive for holiness, to self-denial, and to acts of love and mercy. In this sense, we all share in the common priesthood of Jesus Christ.

But the ordained priest is something altogether different — in the Church and in God’s plan for salvation. Only the priest is ordained to participate in Christ’s own sacred ministry of redemption.

Pope John Paul II said that in ordination a “marvelous exchange” takes place between God and man.

My brothers, tonight we celebrate this marvelous exchange.

By your ordination, you offered your humanity to Christ so that Christ might use you as an instrument of salvation for others. By your ordination he made each one of you “another Christ.”^{iv}

You are privileged to minister *in persona Christi*, in the person of Christ, to renew in his name the sacrifice of our redemption.

Just think for a moment: How closely, how deeply, our Lord has identified himself with you in your priesthood!

He uses your voice to speak his words of mercy, to proclaim glad tidings to those held captive to sin. He uses your hands to heal the brokenhearted, and to offer his Body and Blood as the bread of life.

Each of you is a sacrament — a sign that brings men and women to the encounter with the living God!

Tonight, my brothers, renew your awareness of the nobility — *and the deep mystery* — of your calling as priests.

St. Paul said that the priest was “a steward of the mysteries of God.”^v

And so you are! Never forget: In all the burdens you bear and all the challenges you face. Always remember that your calling is a part of something greater. A steward of the mysteries of God.

Your ministry is written into the very history of salvation. That is the lesson in the readings we have just heard from Sacred Scripture, the Word of God.

In the first reading, Isaiah prophesies about your priesthood, the priesthood of the new and everlasting covenant. “You shall be called *the priests of the Lord*,” he tells us.

And in the Gospel today, Jesus tells us that *he* has fulfilled this prophecy.

He has claimed you as his own. By the laying on of your bishop’s hands, he has anointed you with his Spirit.

He has sent you to carry out the ministry that he gave only to his twelve apostles — to proclaim the Gospel, to forgive sins in his name, to bring all people into the embrace of salvation through the sacred mysteries, the sacraments.

By now, you think know I like to reflect on the lives of the saints. It helps me a lot in my own spiritual life. And I hope that it helps all of us to discover how we are all called to be saints.

I was reading the other day about a new American Venerable, a priest from Buffalo named Nelson Baker. I was thinking about him because this month is the 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War.

Father Baker was just an ordinary person. When the war came, he joined a militia from New York. He fought at Gettysburg. When the war was over he came home and started a successful feed and grain business. He gave a lot of money to the poor. But he was not totally happy. He felt restless.

He felt a calling from the Lord.

That’s how it is with the priesthood, my brothers, isn’t it?

Our priesthood is not the result of a career decision we made. Our priesthood is the response we made to the personal call that God addresses to each of us.

Father Baker was a good administrator — that’s good for a priest. He was a good administrator with a heart for the poor. He started many ministries — a hospital, an orphanage, a vocational training school for boys, and more. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, he was serving more than a million meals a year.

He was also pioneer in pro-life ministry. He discovered that people were dumping unwanted newborns into the Erie Canal. So he started a home for unwed mothers that provided pre-natal care and adoption services. Over the years, they say he found homes for more than 6,000 babies who otherwise would have been abandoned.

In his priesthood, Ven. Nelson Baker was trying to build what he called a “City of Charity.”^{vi}

That is a beautiful vision for your priesthood, my brothers. Let us try to build a City of Charity here in Los Angeles — a city where the love of God is made real in our neighborhoods and homes, in our hearts, and at our altars.

The City of Charity, as we know, begins in the sacrifice that you offer at the altar each day.

The Eucharist is the sacrament of charity, the living sign of God's love for every man and woman.^{vii}

In these coming months we have a wonderful opportunity, all of us, as we prepare to use new translations of the prayers we say in Mass this coming Advent. This is a wonderful moment of grace for our Archdiocese and for the whole Church in the United States to renew our love for Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

My brother priests: I urge you to use this occasion to deepen your love for the Eucharist and for the mysteries you celebrate.

Use this moment of grace also to invite the people that you serve to a deeper experience of the sacred liturgy — so that their lives might be transformed by these holy mysteries, as our lives are transformed every time that we have the blessing of celebrating the Eucharist.

So tonight, my brothers, I pray that you will renew your holy calling and your friendship with Christ.

And my brothers and sisters, this holy season is a time of hope. It is a time for new conversion, for deeper commitment. It is a time to rediscover the enthusiasm, the joy, and the zeal of the common priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Let us try to help one another to grow in holiness.

And my brother priests, we don't have to ever pretend that we are perfect. But acknowledging our weaknesses, let us make every effort to strive for the imitation of the life of Christ.

And let me personally thank each one of you this evening, for your love for God and your service to the people of the Archdiocese. Thank you very much.

So I ask Our Lady of the Angels to help each one of us to renew our common priesthood, our commitment to God and to his Church, so that we all become part of that "City of Charity," the City of Love, that we can share with the people of our time the beauty of God's love for each one of us.

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- i Readings: Isa. 61:1-3, 6, 8-9; Ps. 89; Rev. 1:5-8; Luke 4:16-21
- ii *Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday*, 1986.
- iii Gal. 6:16; Rev. 1:6; 5:9-10; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; compare Exod. 19:6.
- iv *Gift and Mystery* (Doubleday, 1996), 72-73.
- v 1 Cor. 4:1.
- vi O'Malley, *Saints of North America* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2004), 273-278.
- vii Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 1.