



THE DIOCESE OF CHARLESTON

CHRISM MASS HOMILY

April 15, 2014

Isaiah 61: 1-3a,6a,8b-9

Psalms 89: 20-21, 24 and 26

Revelation 1:5-8

Luke 4:16-21

We have heard the Scriptures for today's Mass many times before. Each year for the Chrism Mass they remain the same: there is no A or B or C cycles and they are very strongly focused. In our first reading taken from the Prophet Isaiah, the prophet makes it very clear as to what he perceives his mission to be: to bring good news to the poor and afflicted; to bind up the brokenhearted; to proclaim liberty to captives; to bring release to prisoners; to bring sight to the blind; to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God and to bring comfort and hope to those who mourn. We hear these same words in our Gospel passage, where Jesus, the High Priest applies those very words, that very mission to Himself.

Our responsorial psalm speaks of David, who is anointed by God for mission. He has a task; he is sent forth. God offers him a challenge to lead his people to a deeper sense of trust and relationship with the Lord who has established a covenant relationship with His people. Might we question that if David had lived prior to Isaiah's proclamation, he might have assumed these magnificent words, this powerful challenge to apply to himself as well? The challenge for David was certainly present, and although he may have failed in many ways, David WAS chosen by God as KING "after the Lord's own heart" and was given a mission.

The Scriptures follow through with the common theme; our second reading from the Book of Revelation clearly speaks of God's relationship with us: "He loves us; He washes away our sins; He made us a line of Kings — priests to serve our God."

Looking at these Scriptures that are proclaimed every year on this day, we focus on our priestly commitment, and it seems very clear that the Church asks us to take these words very seriously. To me it

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is apparent that these words are at the very core of what it means to be a priest, and doing our best to live this mission that the Lord gives us is what the Church expects in ordaining us.

I must say, having heard these Scriptures proclaimed for the last 40 years on this day (I have never missed a Chrism Mass since I first entered the seminary) never have they loomed so large in importance in my understanding of the commitment to priesthood as they do now. These words are really what it is all about. I do not recall any serious charge either in the Scriptures or in the Rite of Ordination that we are called as priests to be fundraisers, building engineers, corporate executives, accountants and bookkeepers or personnel directors. All of these roles are important, but only to support the primary mission, and they must never become the main focus of our lives.

Perhaps, it is Pope Francis for whom it is evident that these words of mission are a guiding force in his ministry. He surprises me over and over in his simplicity of purpose — his clear preferential option for the poor and his constant challenge to bishops and priests, and all who are involved in ministry, that we must get back to basics and that our lives must reflect simplicity. Francis wants us to be true shepherds to our people, especially to those who live on the margins, the margins both of poverty and of faith. He wants us to thrust ourselves completely into the herd of sheep — to be truly a part of people's lives and to fulfill what the Spirit of God has anointed us to be.

Francis himself though, does enter effectively into the administrative mode — he has already changed the structure of Roman administration. He has made major changes in the Vatican Bank and in the payroll systems of Vatican employees. He has abandoned any semblance of luxurious living and certainly encouraged Cardinals and bishops to do the same. Indeed, he has also challenged you, my brother priests, to live as simply as possible; all of this without losing the sense of the primary mission. Just yesterday, the Holy Father challenged seminarians in Rome by warning them that they are not preparing to be functionaries, but rather true shepherds in the image of the Good Shepherd. He clearly told them that if this is not the path they are disposed to follow in their image of priesthood and on their journey to ordination, it would be better for them to have the courage to seek another path.

In my reflection on these Sacred Scriptures, I also came to an understanding of how difficult it is to be faithful to the challenges offered to us. I know for myself, and I would imagine for you, my brother priests as well, especially pastors, that there is so much administrative responsibility demanded of us that prayer and personal ministry sometimes is not the highest priority. We live stressful lives — there is just not enough time or energy to do all that is required and we sometimes take our primary role too much for granted. Pope Francis has shown us through his personal witness, that with all our administrative responsibilities, it is still possible to live the life for which we were anointed — still possible to live the promises we made on our ordination day not simply to fulfill a promise, but reaching out to God's people with joy and enthusiasm.

The Holy Father keeps reminding us that our mission (and that is a mission for all of us: ordained, consecrated, married and single) is truly a mission of compassion, a mission of love, a mission of mercy. Francis has emphatically stated that he wishes to intensify a Church that is missionary in outlook, that

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shows the mercy and love of God; a Church that “is not wagging its finger at people, not scolding people, but rather is inviting people, walking with people, befriending people.” And in all of this we strive to do our best to imitate the One who calls us to ministry.

My brother priests, may the promises that we renew today be a new challenge for us to respond more fully, more enthusiastically to the call of Jesus to be good shepherds of His people.

+Robert E Guglielmono

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