

**“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me...”**

*Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo*

*March 31, 2015*

*Chrism Mass  
St. Mary's Cathedral  
Fargo, ND*

Dear friends, Jesus spoke these words from Isaiah to the people of his hometown Nazareth. He tells them that Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled, fulfilled in him! “He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” In effect, Jesus was saying to that startled congregation that he was the fulfillment of all that God had promised, of all that they and their ancestors had hoped and prayed for.

But it doesn't stop there. In the Book of Revelation, Jesus is described as the Lord, “the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth,” who “has made us into a Kingdom, priests for his God and Father.” Priests for his God and Father. We should not think that this passage refers only to those ordained. No, it refers to the priesthood of all the faithful, the priesthood that every member of the Church shares through baptism. The Spirit of the Lord is upon the whole people of God, and he anoints them to be a holy priesthood.

This holy people is first anointed with the Oil of Catechumens and Chrism at baptism, then with Chrism again at Confirmation. And in time of serious illness, we are anointed with the Oil of the Sick. We are a people called to holiness, anointed in the power of the Spirit to offer prayer and a sacrifice of praise. We are anointed to make the world holy by our way of life, by our witness. Like Jesus, who is called the faithful witness in Revelation, we are anointed to be faithful witnesses of Christ in the world. Dear brothers and sisters in the laity, the Spirit of the Lord is upon you so that you may live the Gospel of Christ and witness it to others. Jesus shares his own anointing with you so you might live more fully in him, and then make him known to the world.

During this Holy Week, we have a singular invitation from our Lord to enter deeply into the Paschal Mystery of his passion, death, and resurrection. We are invited to encounter Jesus more fully and to give ourselves more completely to him. And as we contemplate these mysteries and draw nearer to the one who will be pierced through for our offenses, we cannot help but love him all the more. As we draw near to the outpouring of his love, as we receive that love, our own love for him grows. And as we come to know and love Christ, the anointed one, in a deep and personal way, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon us, making us the bearers of glad tidings. By our anointing, we share in his mission and in his joy.

Of course, the words of our Lord should resonate in a special way in the hearts of those who are ordained, our priests together with our deacons. Along with all the baptized, we are called to discipleship, to holiness, to prophetic witness. We too are anointed, for the Spirit of the Lord is upon us, but he has anointed us for a special role of service in the Church. My dear brother deacons, you in particular are called, anointed for diakonia, service to God's people. By proclaiming the Gospel and assisting at the altar, indeed by every service you render, you make present the Lord Jesus, who came as a servant to all.

And dear brother priests, we celebrate the particular anointing which in Christ has become our own. In fact, this Chrism Mass is a special recollection of our own priestly ordinations, whether one year or fifty years ago. When at our ordination the bishop anointed our hands with sacred chrism, we became ministers of the sacred signs of the Redemption and were made to share in the priestly anointing of Jesus. From that moment on, the power of the Holy Spirit, poured out upon us, transformed our lives forever. And now this anointing, this divine power abides within us and remains with us to the end.

Dear brothers, the Spirit of the Lord is upon us, enabling us to speak and act in the very person of Christ, the Head of the Church. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, conforming us to Christ, who died on the cross and rose from the grave to save us from sin and death. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, prompting us to think like Christ, to act like Christ, to live like Christ. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, moving us to love like Christ, who gave his life out of love for his beloved bride the Church. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, empowering us to imitate Christ through a life of prayer, joyful obedience, simplicity, and faithful celibacy. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, sending us out on mission, pushing us outside of our comfort zones, to what Pope Francis calls “the margins, the periphery.” And that margin might be right across the street from your rectory, wherever God’s people are waiting for the good news and the mercy of Christ.

Of course, this anointing, this outpouring of the Spirit, is always a spirit of service and humility. Only this past Sunday, Pope Francis reminded us that the way of Jesus is the way of the cross, the way of humility. So too, the way of the priest must be a way of humility, a way of self-giving and fidelity, the way of the Good Shepherd and the servant.

As you know, in cathedrals throughout the world, bishops will celebrate this Chrism Mass with the priests of their dioceses. My brothers, let us join them with grateful hearts and renew the promises we made on the day of our ordination, when we received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. How can we not feel indebted to Jesus who united us with himself in the dignity and mission of the priesthood? Let us pray that the grace of that anointing will remain with us and comfort us always. May it accompany us every day of our ministry so that, faithful to Christ who has called us, we may serve God’s people with zeal and the joy of the Spirit.

My dear brothers and sisters, I’m sure you are aware that just a few months ago, we celebrated the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Diocese of Fargo. And through these many years, the Spirit of the Lord has been upon us, upon bishops and priests, deacons and seminarians, consecrated religious and faithful laity. God has called us and anointed us to be faithful witnesses and bearers of glad tidings to every corner of this diocese, to win back the lost, to reach out to the wounded, to go out to the margins. Let us pray for a new anointing in the Spirit so that we might be formed into his Kingdom, where Jesus will be the fulfillment of all our hopes.