



The Holy See

CHRISM MASS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Holy Thursday, 9 April 1998

1. *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me"* (Lk 4:18). These words of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, quoted by the Evangelist Luke, recur several times in today's liturgy of the Chrism and are as it were its guiding theme. They recall a ritual act which has a long-standing tradition in the Old Covenant, because in the history of the chosen people it is repeated for the consecration of priests, prophets and kings. By the sign of the anointing, God himself entrusts the priestly, royal and prophetic mission to the men he calls and makes his blessing visible through the fulfilment of the task entrusted to them. All those anointed in the Old Covenant were anointed in view of a single person, he who was to come: Christ, the one and definitive *"Consecrated"*, the *"Anointed"* *par excellence*. It will be the Incarnation of the Word which will reveal the mystery of God, Creator and Father, who sends his only-begotten Son into the world through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He is now present in the synagogue of Nazareth. Nazareth is his town: here he lived and worked for years at his humble carpenter's bench. Today however, he is present in the synagogue in a new role: on the banks of the Jordan, after his baptism by John, he received the solemn investiture of the Spirit who urged him to begin his messianic mission in fulfilment of the Father's saving will. And now he presents himself to his fellow citizens with the words of Isaiah: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"* (Lk 4:18-19). Here the reading ends, and after a pause, he says a few words which astound his listeners: *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"* (Lk 4:21). The declaration leaves no room for doubt: he is the *"Anointed"*, the *"Consecrated One"*, to whom the Prophet Isaiah alludes. In him, the Father's promise is fulfilled.

2. Today, Holy Thursday, we are gathered in St Peter's Basilica to meditate on this event: like the anointed of the Old Covenant, we too turn our gaze to the One the Book of Revelation calls *"the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth"* (1:5). We look towards him, the One they pierced (cf. *Jn 19:37*). Giving his life to free us from sin (cf. *Jn 15:13*), he revealed his *"great love"*; he showed himself as the true and definitive Anointed One who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, redeems us through the Cross. It is on Calvary that his words are completely fulfilled: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me"* (Lk 4:18). This anointing and the sacrifice of the Cross constitute respectively the inauguration and the fulfilment of the incarnate Word's mission.

Holy Thursday commemorates the sacramental manifestation, instituted by Jesus in the Upper Room, of the supreme act of love accomplished on Golgotha, while Good Friday highlights its dramatic and bloody historical aspect. In its twofold dimension, this sacrifice marks the beginning of the "new" anointing in the Holy Spirit and represents the pledge of the descent of the Paraclete upon the Apostles and upon the Church, which is therefore, in a certain sense, celebrating her birth today.³ Dear brother priests, this morning we are gathered around the Eucharistic table on the holy day when we commemorate the birth of our priesthood! Today we celebrate the particular "anointing" which in Christ has also become our own. When during our ordination the Bishop anointed our hands with sacred chrism, we became ministers of the sacred and efficacious signs of the Redemption and were made to share in the priestly anointing of Christ. From that moment, the power of the Holy Spirit, poured out upon us, transformed our life for ever. This divine power endures within us and accompanies us to the end. As we prepare to enter the most holy days on which we commemorate the Lord's Death and Resurrection, we would like to renew our gratitude to the Holy Spirit for the priceless gift he has given us in the priesthood. How can we not feel indebted to the One who wanted to associate us with such a wonderful dignity? This sentiment leads us to give thanks to the Lord for the marvels he has worked in our life; may he help us to consider our ministry with steadfast hope, humbly asking forgiveness for our possible infidelities. May Mary sustain us, so that, like her, we may be led by the Spirit to follow Jesus to the very end of our earthly mission. I wrote in this year's Letter to Priests: *"Accompanied by Mary, the priest will be able to renew his consecration day after day; and the time will come when, trusting the guidance of the Spirit whom he has invoked on his journey as man and as priest, he will set forth upon the ocean of light which is the Trinity"* (n. 7). With this vision and with this hope, let us trustfully continue on the path the Lord opens before us, day after day. May his divine Spirit support and guide us. *Veni, Sancte Spiritus! Amen.* © Copyright 1998 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana