

HOMILY AT MASS OF CHRISM
Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.
Bishop of Fall River
Tuesday of Holy Week, April 11, 2017
Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption

Bishop Coleman, my dear priests, deacons, seminarians, those in Consecrated life, my brothers and sisters:

Thank you all for joining us for this special celebration here today. We come together as the people of God in the Diocese of Fall River to celebrate this special and unique occasion of the blessing of the Holy Oils and the renewal of priestly promises by all the priests gathered here. The celebration of the Chrism Mass is also an opportunity to express our appreciation for the priesthood of Jesus Christ that many of us share. It is a time to thank the Lord for our jubilarians who celebrate priestly milestones in their lives and to give thanks for the graces experienced in their living of the priesthood. We are grateful to you my dear brothers and sisters for being here today to celebrate our priestly commitment and pastoral service.



I want to reiterate to all our priests how important you all are, how grateful we are to you for your lives, your vocation, your priesthood and your service to our diocese, to the Church and to all God's people entrusted to your pastoral care.

A few weeks ago, Sr. Candida Bellotti, a member of the Congregation of St. Camillus de Lallis, celebrated her 110 birthday. During that celebration she was asked to share some wisdom with the guests at the party, since she had accumulated so much experience during a long and fruitful life. She said simply: "Love, love and love still more, with joy. Have faith in the future, and put in as much work as you can to make your wishes come true."

I wish that this celebration here today will remind all of us, especially those of us who have been called to the priesthood and to the service the Lord and his people, that this is what we are called to do: To serve with love and joy all those God has entrusted to our pastoral care and all those we encounter on this journey of life and service.

The Prophet Isaiah said it clearly: *"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; **He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the***

lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners.” That is loving joyfully, and serving with gladness.

“You yourselves shall be named priests of the LORD, ministers of our God shall you be called.” (Is. 61- 1st Reading.)

Recently, Pope Francis was addressing young people in the Vatican and he told them: **If Your Christian Life Is Not One of Service, You Deny Christ.** “Unless those who call themselves Christians live to serve, their lives serve no good purpose. By their lives, they deny Jesus Christ,” he said

The anointing received on the day of our ordination is meant to make us instruments of God to go and anoint God’s faithful people, whose servants and ministers we have become; we are anointed for the poor, for prisoners, for the oppressed, for the brokenhearted. We were not ordained for ourselves, but for others.

How often we encounter people who ask us to pray for them, for their needs and for their families. They feel consoled and encouraged knowing that they are not alone and their deepest needs and burdens are brought in prayer before the Lord.

Therefore, we need to “go out” of our comfort zones in order to bring to others the power of our anointing. To communicate to them the joy of serving, the joy of faith and of a life lived in communion with Jesus.

We are called to live with “the smell of the sheep,” as Pope Francis likes to say, as shepherds in the midst of their flock. We are called to help others encounter Jesus and to have an experience with the Risen Lord.

As priests, we are witnesses to and ministers of the ever-increasing abundance of the Father’s love and mercy. “Not all of us can do great things. But we can all do small things with great love.”

“Do not think that love, in order to be genuine, has to be extraordinary? What we need is to love without getting tired. Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.” (Mother Teresa)

A couple of weeks ago, we all followed in the news the tragic death of a young mother and her 4 children as their home burned to the ground in Warwick. Bill Lyman a member of the Fire Department in Warwick said as he reflected on this

tragedy: "Life's not there for happiness; Happiness is OK. You get there every now and then... What matters is when you're really doing things to help people." So many, risk their lives to be there for others and to serve others.

St. Teresa of Calcutta told us that: "The greatest happiness? Being useful to others. The greatest satisfaction? A done duty."

People who participate in the solution of problems are not as depressed or critical as those who stand on the side line observing.

Let us consider the words of St. John Chrysostom, as he encourages and challenges us when he speaks about the ministry of priests telling us:

As priests they "must be meek in order to be loved more than he is feared. He must be merciful toward others and strict with himself.

He must be pure of heart, so that he neither takes on the empty and useless thoughts of this world, nor involves himself in worldly pursuits.

He must be peaceful so that the people whom he teaches will be solicitous to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

He must be prepared to bear all things, even the most difficult, for the glory of God and the Church, not by a certain vain impulsiveness of soul, but by a true constancy worthy of the martyrs."

The test of greatness in the reign of God is not how many people are in my service but how may I be of service to the many.

(People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care)

When we discover that we have nothing left but God, then we become aware that God is enough.

Remember that "The will of God will never take you where the grace of God cannot keep you."

We do not become priests for our own sake, but for the sake of the kingdom of God and to carry on the mission of the Church. We need to work and pray every day that we may find Joy and Hope in Christ and in belonging to the Church.

You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love.

That is our call: To be rooted in God so that we can then branch out in Service, to continue setting the world on fire for the Gospel of Christ. There are always *some who will put out the fire. Let us not let them stop us. Let us continue to light the fire.*

How can we find Hope in this secularized world we live in, where we see less people going to Church, less vocations entering priesthood, broken families, increasing numbers of “nones,” economic crisis, ecological crisis, thousands running from war, many leaving their homes and country seeking a better life for them and their families, many of them dying on the way before they reach the safe place they seek to rebuild their lives? That is when faith comes in.

It is exactly in the midst of all these challenges and difficulties that we are called to live as Christ lived: To live in union with the Father and in Service to God’s people. We are called to see, to recognize the needs of others and to attend to those needs. Our faith communities are not just a group of people randomly thrown together, but people called by God to help one another become disciples of Christ. Being there for each other will demand personal generosity and sometimes even sacrifice on our part.

If we are not connected with God and united with Him in prayer, we lose wonder, gratitude and enthusiasm, and risk becoming habitually unmoved by grace. Our lives, our ministry becomes dull, joyless and unproductive. As it has been said “a gloomy disciple is a disciple of gloom.”

So, I invite and urge all of us to find:

Joy in Serving

Joy in Being there for others

Joy in Being the Lord’s instruments

Joy in Sharing our faith

Joy in Bringing healing

Joy in Forgiving the sins of others

Joy in Finding forgiveness for our own sins and weaknesses

Joy in Prayer

Joy in Preaching the Gospel of Christ

That is our call: To be rooted in God so that we can then branch out in Service.

**Then we can look to the past with gratitude,
Live the present with passion,
Embrace the future with hope.**