

HOMILY AT MASS OF CHRISM
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Bishop of Fall River
Tuesday of Holy Week, March 27, 2018
Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption

The Chrism Mass is a time to give thanks for our faith and for the gift of the priesthood of Jesus Christ that many of us here today share. It is time to thank the Lord for our jubilarians who celebrate priestly milestones in their lives and give thanks for the graces experienced in their living of the priesthood.

I wish at this celebration here today to let you know, my brother priests, how important you are, to me, to the Church of Fall River and all God's people. I want you to know how appreciative we are for your lives, your vocation, your priesthood and your generous service to the Church.

It is wonderful that we are all here together: Bishop, Priests, Deacons, those in Consecrated life, and the faithful of our Diocese.



We are so grateful to you for being here with us today to celebrate the renewal of priestly commitment and the blessing and consecration of the Holy Oils.

King Philip II was the king of the Ancient Greek kingdom of Macedon from 359 BC to 336 BC. It is said that *he* was the one who coined the maxim *divide et impera* – Divide and Conquer. The Romans used the same idea with a slight twist and called it *divide ut regnes* – but it's still the same idea: Divide and Conquer.

Divide and Conquer is still used today by those who wish to weaken any opposition so they can exert political or economic power and control.

If we take a look at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, we find the early Christians committed to conquer, not by dividing, but by the power of their unity. They began to conquer the world, not with force, or division, but with the weapons of love, service and unity. “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42)... “And every day the **Lord added to their number those who were being saved**” (Acts 2:47).

“The community of believers was of one heart and mind” (Acts 4:32).

The same idea was emphasized at the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization when they said, “For the first Christian **communities, communion** was a constitutive element of the life of faith” (Prop. 41). Communion is not simply a sociological consequence of faith ... it is constitutive element of our faith!

Jesus said to the Pharisees in the Gospel of Matthew: “Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste, and no town or house divided against itself will stand.”

Pope Francis reminded us in *Evangelii Gaudium* that, “Christ has made all things one in himself: heaven and earth, God and man, time and eternity, flesh and spirit, person and society. The sign of this unity and reconciliation of all things in him is peace” (EG #229).

I invite all of us here today to rekindle in our hearts and minds, the gift, the power and strength of our unity in Christ. Think about for a moment the power of unity. One grain of wheat alone by itself is insignificant, but when put together with many others, becomes bread to feed the hungry, and the Bread of Life to nourish our souls. One grape alone is nothing of importance, but squeezed together with many others, produces juice to quench our thirst, wine to bring joy to human hearts and to be transformed into the blood of Christ to strengthen us for the journey.

A few years ago, during the celebration of the Year for Priests, Pope Benedict issued a letter in which he said that, “The ordained ministry has a radical ‘communitarian form’ and can be exercised only in the communion of priests with their bishop. This communion ... needs to be translated into various concrete expressions of an effective and affective priestly fraternity. Only thus will priests be able to live fully the gift of celibacy and build thriving Christian communities in which the miracles which accompanied the first preaching of the Gospel can be repeated.”

We prayed at the beginning of Mass that “we may bear witness to your Redemption in the world.” Like the early Christians, when we bear witness, when we show that we are united in the Lord, our Christian living becomes an instrument of Evangelization.

St. John Paul II wrote in his encyclical *Novo Millennio Ineunte* that, “Communion is the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us to make us all “one heart and one soul” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 42).

We pray in one of the prefaces for Ordinary Time: “Father ... when your children were scattered afar by sin, through the Blood of your Son and the power of the Spirit, you **gathered them again to yourself, that a people, formed as one by the unity of the Trinity, made the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, might ... be manifest as the Church**” (Preface VIII, Sunday in Ordinary Times).

It is in our unity, our common goal, common objective, common mission; it is when we stand together as brother priests and as brothers and sisters, that our mission of evangelization becomes possible.

We find Jesus praying in many places in the Gospel, but I can’t find any more ardent prayer of Jesus than when he prayed before he died: “*that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us*” (John 17: 20-21).

To be Christian is to be drawn into a new relationship - one sisterhood/brotherhood -- of redeemed relationships: Because “*He is our peace ... and has broken down the dividing wall ... so that he might create in himself one new humanity*” united in love and peace.

Where communion is lacking, faith is lacking! Where communion is weak, faith is weak. Faith is not what happens between our ears! It’s what happens in our hearts and how it shows forth in our actions.

This mission and this call to evangelize demands a vital and organic unity between the ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of the laity, “*priests for his God and Father.*” This is lived in a visible fashion each year at the Chrism Mass which brings believers from across our

Diocese to solemnly bless the oils used in the sacraments of the Church – the oil of the sick, the oil of catechumens and the oil of Chrism. The sacramental anointing of the sick finds its full healing power within the believing community which visibly supports the ailing members with active care, prayer and concern. The anointing of candidates for baptism with the oil of catechumens must be the visible expression of the conscious choice of the Christian community to struggle with the sinfulness of our world. The anointing of young candidates for Confirmation with the oil of Chrism must take place within a community which accepts the challenge to live as true disciples of the Lord. Sacraments must energize and empower. They must help build up the Church. They must help change people's lives and transform the world.

“There are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone” (1Cor. 12: 4-6).

The Sacraments are given to us, but not just for us. This is true especially of the Sacraments of Service, and in a unique way the sacrament of Holy Orders. The gifts of the Spirit were given us not for the promotion of self but for the service of others. Our task is to light the Fire and to keep on lighting the FIRES. Sometimes when we gather as the worshiping assembly all we have in common is our absolute ONENESS as brothers and sisters in the body and blood of Christ.

“For then I will remove from your midst the proud braggarts, And you shall no longer exalt yourself on my holy mountain. But I will leave as a remnant in your midst a people humble and lowly, Who shall take refuge in the name of the LORD” (Zeph. 3: 11-13).

Only a humble Church, a Church devoid of domination, can evangelize a world divided, distorted and disfigured by the dominating forces of economic, military and technological powers.

In *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, St. John Paul II reminds us that “people today are often trapped in situations of standardization and loneliness ... and they become even more appreciative of the value of communion. Today, as it was in the beginning of Christianity, this is one of the most eloquent signs and one of the most effective ways of transmitting the Gospel message.”

Because United we stand!