



Bishop Hicks' Column



April 2023: The Chrism Mass: A Call to Newness of Life

By the time you are reading this article, we will probably have already celebrated Palm Sunday, Holy Week, the Triduum and Easter Sunday. During that holy and busy week in the Catholic Church, there is a beautiful, albeit sometimes overshadowed, Mass we celebrate called the "Chrism Mass." Here in the Diocese of Joliet, we gather for it each year on the Monday after Palm Sunday, and I would like to share with you why I love it so much.

During this joyous and powerful celebration, there are two additional parts that are included in the Mass. The first one is the "*Renewal of Priestly Promises*." Immediately after the homily, the priests all stand and the bishop begins to address them with these words: "*Beloved sons, on the anniversary of that day when Christ our Lord conferred his priesthood on his Apostles and on us, are you resolved to renew, in the presence of your Bishop and God's holy people, the promises you once made?*" This year at the Chrism Mass, as I listened to the priests renewing their promises with zeal and courage, I felt a deep sense of unity with them and gratitude for them. I also thanked God not only for their original "Yes" to the priesthood, but also for publicly reaffirming their commitment throughout all the ups and downs of the journey.

The second additional part is the "*Presentation of the Oils*." The Oil of the Sick and the Oil of Catechumens are first presented and blessed. Then the Chrism oil is presented to the bishop. Right before the bishop consecrates it, he pours the 'chrism essence' into the container and stirs the oil, then he literally breathes upon it, recalling when Jesus breathed on his disciples after the resurrection, thus sending the Holy Spirit. (John 20:22)

I love that after this Mass, representatives from each of our parishes and various institutions receive a box containing the newly blessed Oils and return to their parishes with these Holy Oils. On Holy Thursday, these Holy Oils are presented in all of our parishes at the beginning of the Mass of the Lord's Supper.

These Holy Oils are used throughout the year for the Sacraments of the Anointing of the Sick, Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders, and in the dedication of a new church and/or a new Altar.

Immediately after the blessing of the new Oils at the Chrism Mass, we turn to the Liturgy of the Eucharist as the gifts of bread and wine are presented with this prayer over the offerings, "*May the power of this sacrifice, O Lord we pray, mercifully wipe away what is old in us and increase in us grace of salvation and newness of life.*" It strikes me that the Chrism Mass magnifies this newness of life through Christ our Lord as the priests renew their promises and as the people bring back the new holy oils to their parishes. This newness of life was celebrated in your parish on Easter Sunday and these Holy Oils will be used in your parish and ministries in the year ahead to renew us in our lives.

After the Chrism Mass, as I exited the Cathedral and I was walking through the parking lot, I noticed a small group of people who had also attended the Mass. They were walking to their car, gently carrying the newly blessed Holy Oils almost like parents carrying a new-born baby into the house for the first time. I was delighted by their care and attention.

They told me that they had driven to the Cathedral from Kankakee. One of the women then said, "Bishop, I felt like I won the golden ticket when I was asked to represent my parish at this Mass today. It was just splendid! And it reminded me that our diocese is a lot bigger than just my parish. It felt good to worship with the larger Church today."

As I started my car, I thought about her comment. Sometimes, we might think that the Church is only as big as our experience in our own local parish. We can easily get focused on just our own personal communities, realities, needs and issues. And yet, we are a large and diverse diocese made up of many people from various demographics and locations with a wide variety of opinions and points of view. Through it all, part of the beauty of what makes us "Catholic" is that amid our diversity and individual parish experiences, we are also united in Christ. And yet together, wholeheartedly, we all believe that salvation is only through, with and in Him.

So, as I drove home from the Chrism Mass with a smile on my face, I spontaneously uttered a prayer of thanksgiving to God for all of the laity, religious women and men, deacons and priests across our diocese, and for the newness of life that we share, united through Christ, our Lord.