

Homily for Chrism Mass
St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat
Monday, April 3, 2023

As we read the Scriptures, we see that the people of Israel went through various times of trial. There were years of forced labour as slaves in Egypt. There were the years of wandering in the desert. There were the years of exile in Babylon. Throughout their history, the people knew times of poverty, times when they were broken hearted, times of mourning, times when they were downcast and despondent.

Against this rather gloomy background, the words of the prophet Isaiah shone like a brilliant light. They shone as a light to disperse the darkness and give the people new hope. Isaiah spoke of one who would be anointed by God to bring good news to those who were suffering. To those who were weighed down with grief and sadness, the anointed one would bring joy and gladness.

“The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken, to comfort all those who mourn and to give them for ashes a garland; for mourning robes the oil of gladness, for despondency, praise.”

As we reflect on the Scriptures this evening, I'd like to focus on the phrase “the oil of gladness”.

During this Mass we bless the oils we use in celebrating some of the sacraments. We bless the Oil of Catechumens, used in preparation for Baptism. We bless the Oil of Chrism, used in Baptism and Confirmation and Ordination. We bless the Oil of the Sick, used to anoint those suffering some illness or infirmity. I invite you to reflect on how in some way each of these oils is an “oil of gladness”.

When we anoint with the Oil of Catechumens, we pray that those anointed will be rescued from darkness and brought into the light of Christ. We pray that the weakness and sadness of sin may give way to the strength and gladness of salvation.

When we anoint with Chrism in Confirmation, we say, “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit. We pray that those confirmed will be blessed with all the wonderful gifts that the Spirit brings. “Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their helper and guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence.” All these gifts are surely designed to bring joy and gladness.

When we anoint with Chrism in Ordination, we say, “The Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, guard and preserve you that you may sanctify the Christian people.” The priest is anointed to sanctify the people so that they will enjoy the fruits of the Spirit, including the fruits of love, peace and joy.

When we anoint with the Oil of the Sick we pray, “Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.” We pray that those bowed down by the sadness of sickness might be raised up to enjoy the gladness of the Spirit’s healing.

In these various ways, each of these oils is an oil of gladness, an oil that can bring us the joy and gladness of Christ.

As we bless the oils this evening, I invite you to pray for all those who will be anointed with these oils. May the words of the prophet Isaiah be fulfilled for them. Through these oils may the poor come to know good news, may broken hearts be healed, may those who are suffering find comfort, may those who are downcast find reason to give praise, may those who mourn be blessed with the oil of gladness.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR