

Bishop Paul Bird's Message for Easter 2025

At times, we all need a soothing anointing

In the days before Easter, Catholic communities around the world celebrate the Chrism Mass, a ceremony in which we bless oils used in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination and the Anointing of the Sick. This ceremony focuses on the soothing practice of anointing. In doing so, it highlights the times when we are in need of a soothing anointing. In the course of our lives, each one of us can feel weary or stressed. We can feel weak and fragile. We can be in need of the comforting and strengthening that anointing can bring.

In the Chrism Mass, we bless the Oil of Baptism, the Oil of Chrism and the Oil of the Sick. In various ways, each of these oils offers us strength in the midst of our frailty.

When we are anointed with the Oil of Baptism, we acknowledge our weakness and we pray that we might be made strong to meet the challenges of living as a Christian. When we are anointed with Chrism, whether in Baptism or Confirmation or Ordination, we become more like Christ, the Anointed One of God. We are given a share in the priesthood of Christ to offer praise to our heavenly Father. We are given a share in Christ's spirit of prophecy to be able to speak the truth in love. We are given a share in Christ's kingship, that we might be true Christian leaders, giving ourselves in serving others. When we are anointed with the Oil of the Sick, we recognise our frailty and we pray for healing in body and mind and spirit.

In one of his homilies, Pope Francis reflected on the weariness that we sometimes feel in our lives. There was a large number of priests concelebrating with him at the Mass and he spoke in particular of the weariness that can come in the life of a priest. He spoke of the Lord's concern for all who are weary, including priests who sometimes feel burdened.

Pope Francis spoke of the fatigue that can come from fulfilling daily tasks. He spoke of the extra weariness that can come with a time of sickness. Recently we have seen Pope Francis himself burdened with sickness. In his homily, Pope Francis assured priests that he prays for them as they labour among the people of God entrusted to their care. In the last few months, people around the world have been praying for Pope Francis as he labours under the weight of illness.

We are all in need of prayerful support. We know our weakness, but we also know that we have great sources of strength that we can draw on. In our times of frailty, we can turn to Christ in prayer. We might recall his encouraging words: "Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest." We can also be a support to one another. Like Christ, we have been anointed to bring good news to the poor and bind up hearts that are broken. In times of need, we can be good news to one another. When hearts are broken, we can help to mend them. In times of sadness, our kindness can bring comfort. Our support can be like a soothing anointing, bringing healing and peace.

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