

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
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At the first session of Vatican II an aged bishop from what was then Yugoslavia urged the Council Fathers to add the name of St. Joseph to the Roman Canon or First Eucharistic Prayer. His suggestion was met with disdain, but Pope John XXIII knew that the old Bishop had been imprisoned for nine years by the communists who broke both of his legs and left him in pain. The Holy Father made, as you might remember, the first change in the canon in many years and added the name of his patron.

In course of the Council the Fathers learned that 26 of the bishops present bore on their bodies scars of communism.¹ Tonight as we gather to celebrate the Chrism Mass and renew the promises of priestly ordination, it is fitting that we consider the sacerdotal witness to the Gospel, service to truth, and the abundance of divine mercy we are called to minister.

In His home town Jesus repeats the word of the prophet Isaiah and announces that He has been anointed “to bring glad tidings to the poor”, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed, and a year acceptable to the Lord. How men and women long to hear those glad tidings and how difficult it is to reach them with the saving message of God! It is such a paradox that at the moment when communication is so simple and so immediate, people struggle to be understood and to reveal their deepest aspirations, as we toil to reach them with the Gospel that frees.

Everyone here recognizes the importance of transmitting the life-giving word of God, which alone has the power to free the human person and allow him or her to reach the fullness of potential. We are ready to dedicate our waking hours to preaching the truth about Jesus Christ.

So often we look out at the congregations on military installations and we do not see an abundance of youthful countenances eager to soak up the freeing message of Jesus. They can be captive to so much and not recognize the truth that the Christ tells us will set us free. Society has filled our world with so much noise that it is hard to contemplate fundamental and significant questions.

¹ Cf. Richard Beyer, *The Catholic Heart*, p.72.

Studies tell us that emerging adults are not uncomfortable talking about religion. If we care about them, and indeed we do, we must learn to engage youth seriously “from early on and not cut them adrift as they move through the teenage years”. We are challenged to address the crisis of knowledge and value that beset our culture today.² It is indeed not a question of more programs, but the ability to listen and to teach. The Lord Jesus was able to look out at the multitude and see that they were sheep without a shepherd. Constituted as shepherds, it is incumbent upon us to find paths to touch the hearts of our young people, draw them close to the Lord, and make certain that they understand how, in the words of the venerable Pope John Paul II, to open wide the doors to Christ.

So also we consider our duty to the Veterans. The chaplains in the VA system creatively look for ways to insert that liberating Gospel in the midst of those who are ill. It is the offer of spiritual sight to the blind, the healing touch of Christ in the sacrament of the sick whose oil I will bless this night. That word of life must liberate those afflicted by the weight of post traumatic stress and those estranged from their families. In those places we recognize the importance of our fervent prayer and our selfless ministry. It may be that less than 1% of our population is engaged in war or suffers its effects, but at least 90% of the faithful of the Archdiocese gathered this night bears the weight of the longest war in our history.

We bring those intentions to our prayers in this hour here in Mary’s House, where we experience the love of our Mother. We sense the hope in Isaiah’s prophecy to an exiled people. We believe in the realization of his word in the person of Jesus Christ, whose word is truth.

It is, dear sisters and brothers, a word of truth. It must resound whether convenient or not. So often our society determines what is right or wrong on the basis of opinion polls or the will of a supposed majority. Yet we are charged to preach the Gospel and as its ministers we will be judged on how faithfully we have done so. Windsocks are useful in aviation, but they are not so effective when it comes to our task of being faithful to the One who sent us.

Challenging times are upon us and we must be prepared to remain faithful. The dictatorship of relativism, about which the then Cardinal Ratzinger warned the Cardinals on the eve of his election, is ever more insidious in its message and the means used to advance its power. We are called to be aware, courageous, and effective in our preaching of the truth.

His is also a word of peace in the midst of a time of conflict. The recent post-synodal exhortation *Verbum Domini* reminds us that peace, while elusive, is possible.

“In fidelity to the work of reconciliation accomplished by God in Jesus Christ crucified and risen, Catholics and men and women of goodwill must commit themselves to

² Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition*, p. 299.

being an example of reconciliation for the building of a just and peaceful society. We should never forget that ‘where human words become powerless because the tragic clash of violence and arms prevails, the prophetic power of God’s word does not waver, reminding us that peace is possible and that we ourselves must be instruments of reconciliation and peace’.³

The Book of Revelation speaks about a kingdom founded on our relationship with God. If we are authentic disciples of Jesus, our existence leaves footprints in the world and we give witness to the presence of the Light of the world: gradually there is evidence of more justice, love, and peace. The three Christological titles given in this passage evoke the passion, death, and Resurrection, which we so solemnly commemorate in Holy Week. Jesus is the faithful witness to the Father, because He has revealed Him, the first to rise, the first born among the dead who guarantees our resurrection. He is also the beginning and the end of human history and of everything we do in His Name.

For this reason we will shortly bless the oils of Catechumens and of the Sick and consecrate Sacred Chrism so that those symbols of the sacred actions we perform in the person of Christ are reserved uniquely for those functions. Last Holy Thursday Pope Benedict reflected on the nature of oil in Christian usage:

“I should like, then, to attempt a brief interpretation of the mystery of this holy sign in its essential reference to the priestly vocation. In popular etymologies a connection was made, even in ancient times, between the Greek word “*elaion*” – oil – and the word “*eleos*” – mercy. In fact, in the various sacraments, consecrated oil is always a sign of God’s mercy. So the meaning of priestly anointing always includes the mission to bring God’s mercy to those we serve. In the lamp of our lives, the oil of mercy should never run dry. Let us always obtain it from the Lord in good time – in our encounter with His word, in our reception of the sacraments, in the time we spend with Him in prayer.”⁴

Tonight, dear Brothers, you will renew the promises made at your ordination. They are not mere words, but the elements of a covenant, a communion of life with the Lord Jesus who called you, sustains you, and allows you to represent Him in the lives of those who need your ministry. You represent many more who, spread across the globe, join you in the service of the faithful entrusted to us for pastoral care. They will join local bishops in this celebration, but all are present here, because the Eucharist, which marks us as a people, knows no limitation of time and space.

Tonight we invoke divine assistance so that we can remain faithful, we can speak the truth, we can walk in the footsteps of centuries of ordained ministers who never turned back from the plow, who spoke the truth—regardless of the reaction, and who served without counting the cost.

³ *Verbum Domini*.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, 1.IV.10.

St. Joseph found his way into the Roman Canon to remind us of his patient attention to the Blessed Virgin and the Christ Child. He is an excellent example for our celibate fecundity. He shows us how to protect Christ and to place Him at the center, regardless of how appealing the protagonist's role might seem. He will sustain us, just as he did the victims of communist persecution.