

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio J.C.D.
Chrism Mass, 2010
(23.III.10)



Willa Cather in her masterpiece *Death Come for the Archbishop* recounts the immense missionary efforts of the first Archbishop of Santa Fe, Jean Baptiste Lamy. The descriptions of the countryside, the people, and the problems related to establishing the diocese and reforming ecclesial life offer a wonderful picture of a missionary's apostolate in the southwest in the XIX century. While some of the details may be romanticized, the commitment evidenced in the lives of those French missionaries makes manifest the presence of the Spirit of the Lord, the fidelity of their witness, and the tirelessness of their efforts in uncertain conditions.

This Year of the Priest has afforded us a constant reminder of those priestly gifts and virtues along with an invitation to be renewed in our response to the generous invitation of the Lord. The Chrism Mass, even in this global Archdiocese, offers us an occasion to pray for priests and for the ordained to renew our commitment to the Lord who called us to be His ministers.

The prophet Isaiah, the third author with that name, proclaims a wonderful word of encouragement to the Chosen People about to end their exile in Babylon. It is a message of hope, despite the formidable task of rebuilding a way of life, a country, and a religious civilization. He assures them that the Spirit of the Lord is present and active.

Jesus quotes the same passage at the beginning of His public ministry. He is in His home town, Nazareth. He appears as a known commodity, but is He really known? His fellow citizens are convinced about His identity, but they are obviously quite unaware of who He really is or in what His mission consists. Again, the conditions are adverse, but the Spirit is present and active.

Dear Brothers, as we fulfill our sacerdotal ministry, we also experience the presence and the power of the Spirit upon us. We give thanks for the call received, for the ministry we have accomplished in the name and person of the Lord, and for the specific service rendered around the globe to the men and women of the military, the veterans, and their families.

Not unlike Archbishop Lamy and the missionaries with him, with not even three hundred active-duty priests, we are extremely short-handed and faced with a daunting task. We draw on that Spirit to be able to go the extra mile, to meet one last need, and

to respond to the perplexity of one more young Catholic looking for our counsel. We look for the oil of gladness and a glorious mantle instead of a listless spirit.

This evening we invoke the Spirit once again over the oils to be used in the celebration of the sacraments throughout the coming year. The symbolism is rich. The oil is pressed out from the olives, a fruit which continues to come from very old trees. It reminds us of the perpetual newness of divine life, even when it flows forth from ancient rites and in accord with centuries of tradition. The pressing also aptly describes the condition of ministry in the Archdiocese: a reduced number of priests striving to serve the same or an increased number of faithful. It describes well the ministry of my faithful Auxiliaries and mine: ruled by airline timetables, distances, and commitments across the globe.

The image of oil is rich, however, because it flows, penetrates, and is difficult to clean. So also is divine grace. It flows from the sacraments. It molds and changes the hearts of those who meet Christ in them. Here we see the innocent face of a baby at baptism or the eagerness of a catechumen about to be anointed in the scrutinies or the earnest and questioning expression of an adolescent before confirmation. We can also see the wounded man or woman on the roadside in a foreign land or at the infirmary as he or she awaits medical evacuation to Landstuhl. Let us also look to the head of a future auxiliary bishop or the hands of our co-sponsored and see there the abundance of divine grace and favor. All are here spiritually this evening and we invoke a blessing upon this oil which will be used in ministry to them!

We pray tonight that the same Spirit might penetrate the hearts of all of us here present and those who we are privileged to serve. May it fortify the hearts of the wavering and recall to the font of life those who have strayed. May it also penetrate the hearts of those who are recalcitrant or create opposition to our ministry. Current events challenge our witness. Some disregard the Magisterium and others seek to place themselves in that role. Still others question the natural law and attack those who defend it. Yet our witness is consistent and our service to life unshaken. Our testimony must leave its trace like the oil we will bless shortly.

For divine life, like oil, resists those who try to eliminate the sacred or deny the faith of their initial calling. It resists those who would distort the truth or deny its existence. It seeks to engage those who are searching. That image of the Good Shepherd with the strayed lamb across His shoulders is a comforting one for us as we seek to imitate the ministry of Jesus Christ.

This evening we celebrate our fidelity as we renew the promises made at ordination. We are not blind to our frailty or to our shortcomings. However, we continue to try. We have not turned back from the plow. We pledge our fidelity and our desire to continue our service. The generous service of the priests who enjoy the faculties of this world-wide Archdiocese can only be a cause for rejoicing in the heart of this archbishop.

Like Israel in the first reading no longer identified with a geographical entity, we are bearers and instruments of salvation. The passage from the Book of Revelation reminds us that the people of God, created by Christ through baptism, does not constitute a nation like the others, but a priestly people led by the One they have pierced. It is a people consecrated not to exercise power, but to transmit salvation. This salvation lays bare the sinfulness of humanity, but at the same time the mercy and pardon of God.¹

It is a great calling, which humbles those who receive it and at the same time invigorates our desire to serve those who are entrusted to our pastoral care. It allows us to minister even when the conditions are adverse, the demands overwhelming and endless, and the circumstances unexpected. As I knelt to wash military feet in Mosul and in Baghdad last Holy Thursday, the symbolism etched the reality of this ministry on my heart. This Archdiocese exists to serve those who serve their country wherever they may be found.

As our Holy Father observed in proclaiming the Year of the Priest: “How can we fail to be moved when we recall that the gift of our priestly ministry flows directly from [the] heart [of Christ]? How can we forget that we priests were consecrated to serve, humbly yet authoritatively, the common priesthood of the faithful? Ours is a mission which is indispensable for the Church and for the world, a mission which calls for complete fidelity to Christ and constant union with him. To abide in his love entails constantly striving for holiness, as did Saint John Mary Vianney.”²

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, this night is significant, because we gather to celebrate the gift of priesthood by consecrating and blessing the oils that will be used in the ministry of this vast Archdiocese. We give thanks for service by serving and we recognize the bountiful goodness of our Divine Savior to ensure our holiness. I evoked the image of Archbishop Lamy who accomplished his mission some 125 years ago, because we constantly build on the fruits of the labor of those who go before us. We can gather in this crypt this evening, because others have been faithful previously and passed on what they too have received. Can we do anything less?

¹ Cf. *Lezionario meditato*, 3, p. 578.

² Benedict XVI, 19.VI.2010.