



Homily for the Mass of Chrism

Cardiff Cathedral

Tuesday 30th March 2021

Archbishop George Stack

We would be excused for not seeing one piece of good news in the avalanche of bad and sad news which comes our way each day through newspaper, television and the internet. The good news of which I speak was mentioned briefly in the media on 18th March. It reported that some days earlier, fragments on parchment of the bible had been found in caves near the Dead Sea. The fragments are over two thousand years old. Newsreaders report that this is the most important discovery of ancient biblical texts since that of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947.

The fragments come from what we call the 'minor' Old Testament prophets - Zephaniah and Nahum. Nahum prophesied to the people of Israel that they would be allowed to return from their exile by the king of Assyria. Five hundred years before the time of Jesus, Zechariah taught them how they were to live when eventually they were allowed to return to Jerusalem. One fragment of the recently discovered text says: *"These are the things you are to do. Speak the truth to one another. Render true and perfect justice in your gates"*. As meaningful today as they were when they were written.

These 'minor' prophets were encouraging the people of Israel to remain faithful to God, to trust in God, to be in the presence of God. The first cousin of these 'minor' prophets,

the ‘major’ prophet Isaiah told them how and when these promises were to be fulfilled. Was it mere coincidence, do you think, that it was the scroll of the prophet Isaiah which was handed to Jesus in the synagogue on his return to Nazareth? We heard it this morning. *“The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me. For he has anointed me”*. And then he added his own prophetic words. *“This text is being fulfilled today, even as you listen”*.

The name Christ means “The Anointed One”. Anointing is an act of care and compassion as when we put ointment on a wound to help it heal, or when an athlete puts it on a muscle to give it strength. The religious significance is given again in the Old Testament when the oil was poured over the head of Aaron the priest and ran down, not just his head, but his beard also. The same with the ancient kings of Israel. The consecration with oil was to set them apart for a sacred task – to glorify God and glorify God’s people in their service of God.

The three oils we bless and consecrate today speak to us of those same truths. The Oil of the Sick reveals God’s compassion with us. Compassion. Cum-Passio. The willingness and capacity to “suffer with”. Pain, suffering, sickness, death. These all contradict the urge within us for health and strength and life. So often they are seen as

contradicting the will of God. They are a waste of time. Yet no time is wasted in which God is served. The service of God is the sanctification of time. In sickness, we come closest to the suffering and passion of Jesus, when we are no longer in control but have to 'abandon' ourselves into the hands of others, into the hands of God. The Oil of the Sick is a sign of the bond between ourselves and the suffering Christ.

The Oil of Baptism contains within it a prayer for strength, a prayer for faithfulness, a prayer that we may resist anything that separates us from God. Oil binds and heals. It is a reminder that we in turn must be healers and reconcilers, binding up the broken in this fragmented world. Whenever I make the sign of the cross with the Oil of Baptism on the chest of the one to be baptised, I remember the words of the Song of Songs: *"Set me as a seal upon your heart. For love is strong – as death"*.

Jesus the Christ, the Anointed One, is both Priest and Victim as he offers perfect worship to God on behalf of God's people. Through faith, through Baptism, through Holy Communion, we re-member, put back together again, the broken fragments of the Body of Christ which is the Church. When we come to worship God at Mass, we are not doing so in our own individual way. We are taken up into the perfect worship that Jesus offers. That is way we are called a Priestly

People. Just as the priest and the bishop are anointed with the Oil of Chrism so that they may 'lead' the worship of God, so each one of you who is baptised is anointed with this same Chrism and reminded that you, too, are empowered to speak and act the word of God. Privileged to worship God in His way, not merely in our own individual and personal way. Through anointing you learn that true kingship, true power, true greatness comes through the service of others. *"If I your Lord and master have washed your feet, you should wash each others feet. I have given you an example that you should follow"*. All of this summed up in the consecration of Holy Oil which we are privileged to perform today.
