

Chrism Mass 2023 Homily
Most Reverend John O. Barres
Diocese of Rockville Centre
St. Agnes Cathedral
Tuesday, April 4, 2022

I. Introduction

This afternoon we gather for our Chrism Mass 2023 in this time of Eucharistic Revival.

II. Gratitude

At this Chrism Mass, when the gift of priesthood is celebrated, let me begin by thanking our priests.

Brothers, we have an exceptional presbyterate. You are an inspiration to each other in the solidarity, humility, and magnanimity of your fraternity.

Brothers, you are an inspiration to me and to all you serve!

I express gratitude today for the dedicated and vibrant episcopal ministries of our auxiliary Bishops, Bishop Andrzej, Bishop Coyle and Bishop Romero.

Allow me to voice our collective thanks for Bishop Murphy, Bishop Dunne and our retired priests, and deacons.

Brothers, thank you for your *faithful witness*. We are blessed to be beneficiaries of your continued ministry, your precious and hard-earned wisdom, and your fervent prayer.

Together we take great pride that on April 20, 2023 in Rome our Bishop Emeritus William Francis Murphy will be receiving the Pontifical North American College's

Annual Rector's Award in recognition of his many years of service to the North American College as an alumnus and a board member.

As we know, Bishop Murphy is a global Churchman who has always taught us that a love for the Holy Father and the Eternal City, a love for peace and justice, makes us even more effective Catholic evangelizers on Long Island.

Mentor of seminarians, priests and bishops, champion of our heroic and courageous lay people who witness to our Catholic Faith in the public square, Bishop Murphy's joyful Gospel spirit and intelligent fidelity to the Splendor of Catholic truth always inspires and encourages us.

Our prayers and affection for a truly great Catholic Churchman. *Ad Multos Annos* Bishop Murphy!

At every Mass we remember those who have gone before us, and at this Chrism Mass, we pray for the souls of our deceased bishops, priests, deacons and their families. We pray for the soul of Msgr. Dennis Regan who died early this morning. May God grant them light and peace.

The Chrism Mass is a time to pray for Pope Francis and be in solidarity with his spirit of global mission and universal fraternity.

We give thanks too for the evangelizing life and pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI (1927-2022) who died this past December 31st. We give thanks for the gift of his far-seeing biblical, systematic and liturgical theology – all grounded in intellectual and pastoral charity.

The past year we experienced the Lord's closeness in many ways and especially in the ordinations celebrated at St. Agnes. They were moments when *the oil of gladness* was poured upon us.

I thank, too, our dedicated deacons who live their *diakonia* in our parishes and in various apostolates.

We look forward to the May 20, 2023 Permanent Diaconate Ordinations of Paul Cavanagh, Michael Hoonhout, Cary Klivan, Douglas Moran, Michael O'Brien, and James Totino.

We give thanks for the June 18, 2022 Ordination to the Priesthood of Fr. Louis Cona, Fr. Christopher Heller and Fr. Stephen Rooney.

We look forward to the June 10, 2023 Ordination to the Priesthood of Deacon Steven McClernon, and Idente Missionaries Deacon Jinwoo Michael Nam and Deacon Ditto Subin Wilson.

Brothers, our prayers are with you as you prepare for ordination.

Recalling the newly ordained and those to-be-ordained, we think too of our jubilarians who celebrate milestones. We give thanks to God for our priest jubilarians and the graces experienced in their faithful living of the priesthood, and we are grateful for our deacons who mark milestones in their service to the People of God.

We also express our prayers and best wishes to Fr. Collins Adutwum and Fr. Anthony Saliba who are now officially incardinated in the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

At this Chrism Mass, and along with our transitional deacons and seminarians who are present today, we pray as a presbyterate for a rich harvest of vocations, most especially to the priesthood, as we recommit to casting our nets in every parish, every Catholic and public school, and in every university on Long Island. May the Lord send laborers into His harvest!

We are so grateful today for the presence of so many students from our evangelizing Catholic High Schools on Long Island. We are also grateful for the presence of our university students who represent our Catholic campus ministries.

III. The Catholic Priesthood, Eucharistic Revival and the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

June 2023 as the Month of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Diocese of Rockville Centre

On Friday, June 16, 2023, we will celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and the World Day of Sanctification for Priests. I am excited to announce again that beginning with June 2023 and going forward, we will

celebrate **June as the Month of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus** in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, proclaiming to the world that “God is love.”

Our hope will be to renew and advance the beautiful tradition of contemplating God’s love for humanity – shown so powerfully in the Pierced Heart of the Savior. We need His love, as does every dimension of the global public square.

Therefore, under the theme of *God is Love*, we pray that a renewed devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus this June will open us to God’s love and moral teaching. As our Lord says in John’s Gospel: “If you love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

Bishop Andrzej, Fr. Matt Browne and their team have already been in touch with you about the range of creative evangelizing opportunities and beautiful artistic parish graphics connected to this proclamation.

Permit me to highlight a few themes on the relationship between the Catholic priesthood and the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus as a proximate preparation for our presbyterate launching this June 2023 evangelizing initiative and as a way of effectively advancing our Eucharistic Revival.

The Catholic Priesthood, the Catholic Mass and the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

In the Eucharistic liturgy, we peer, as it were, into the Heart of Jesus opened in death by the spear of the Roman soldier. Jesus’ Heart was opened for us and before us. God’s own Heart was opened, and God’s Heart opens our priestly hearts to the humility, courage, heroism and evangelizing creativity inscribed in the ontological change of our Priesthood Ordination. The liturgy interprets for us the language of Jesus’ Heart, and as we enter into its rhythm, we understand that our priestly ministry must always be grounded in the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.¹

In his 2003 encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope St. John Paul II writes: “If the Eucharist is the center and summit of the Church’s life, it is likewise the center and summit of priestly ministry. For this reason, with a heart filled with gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ, I repeat that the Eucharist ‘is the principal and central *raison*

¹ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI’s Homily on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the Conclusion of the Year for Priests, June 11, 2010.

d'etre of the sacrament of priesthood, which effectively came into being at the moment of the institution of the Eucharist.” (31)

These words inspire us to plunge deeper into the Paschal Mystery celebrated at every Mass and to plunge deeper into the Paschal Mystery inscribed in us through our baptism and in our priestly sacramental character and identity.

These words inspire us to deepen the Eucharistic reverence expressed in our voice, our gestures, our pace, our moments of liturgical silence and expressed in so many refined and subtly beautiful ways in every dimension of our *ars celebrandi*.

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and the Tenth Promise of the Sacred Heart to Give Priests the Gift of Touching the Most Hardened Hearts

Devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, as we know, has a rich biblical, dogmatic and spiritual theology articulated by a wide range of popes, saints and theologians.

Sr. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) gives a beautiful account of her mystical prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament. She writes: “Once when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, my soul being absorbed in extraordinary recollection, Jesus Christ, my sweet Master, presented Himself to me. He was brilliant with glory; His five wounds shone like five suns. Flames darted forth from all parts of His sacred humanity, but especially from His adorable breast, which resembled a furnace, and which opening, displayed to me His loving and amiable Heart, the living sources of these flames...”

Our devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus helps teach us how to reach even the most hardened of hearts in our priestly ministry.

The Tenth Promise of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus as revealed to the Church by St. Margaret Mary reads: **“I will give to priests the gift of touching the most hardened of hearts.”**

As priests of the Divine Mercy, as priests who are both humble penitents and compassionate confessors, we ask the Holy Spirit to give us the many contemplative and pastoral gifts needed to touch the most hardened hearts.

In order to do this, we have to pray and open our own priestly hearts to beat in rhythm with the humility, meekness, sacrifice, courage, fortitude and fidelity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

As we know, one of the largest religious groups in the United States today are inactive Catholics and ex-Catholics.

To be receptive to this gift of touching these most hardened of hearts, our priestly devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus requires us to be united to the wounds of Christ.

And division is a wound.

As we celebrate this Chrism Mass and proclaim the tender mercy of Our Lord and His compassion for sinners, I ask all of us to seek that mercy, repentance and renewal that flow from His Most Sacred Heart.

When that mercy touches our wounded hearts – the wounds of sin, lukewarmness, blindness, cynicism and a negative and critical spirit -- it gives us the grace to live our priestly call with new zeal and authenticity.

Fr. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis writes: “The Christian must daily put his hand into the glorious wound in the side of Christ.”²

As priests, you place your anointed hand on that Glorious Wound as you strive daily to “conform your life to the mystery of the Lord’s cross.” (Rite of Ordination).

As I bless the Oil of the Sick and Oil of Catechumens and as I consecrate the Chrism, we recall with Pope Francis that we Catholic priests “have been anointed to anoint.”³

Christ’s Glorious Wound transforms our wounds -- the wounds we have experienced in every dimension of our lives and our priesthood.

² Fr. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the World: Meditations on the Gospel according to Matthew* (Volume 1) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 46.

³ Pope Francis’ 2019 Chrism Mass homily.

Our openness to allowing the Holy Spirit to touch our own wounds and our hearts makes them birthplaces of priestly mercy, compassion and pastoral wisdom.

That accessible priestly heart is a humble heart: “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

As we renew our priestly promises today at this Chrism Mass, we recommit ourselves to that steadfast and gentle priestly humility that keeps us centered on God’s will, faithful to a disciplined daily spiritual life and generous and magnanimous in pastoral charity.

In our priestly promises today, we reconnect to that gift of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and thus can touch the most hardened of hearts.

We remember in our priestly ministry that a compassionate, understanding and priestly heart actively reflects the rhythms of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus by being a courageous witness to the objective truths of our faith, the Ten Commandments and every dimension of the “unity of truth” in our Catholic moral teaching.

Truth, charity, mercy and compassion can never be separated.

The Truths of our Catholic faith are intrinsically and inherently *pastoral* and compassionate precisely because they are liberating.

As we ask at this Chrism Mass for the grace of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus to animate and uplift our priestly hearts in these challenging times, I want to express my thanks to each one of you for your courage, your commitment to deep and consistent prayer, your pastoral and evangelizing creativity, your steadiness, your fine prudential judgment and your determination to support each other fraternally in a spirit of presbyteral unity and charity.

