

Chrism Mass 2019 Homily
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Bishop of Rockville Centre (Long Island, New
York)
Thursday, April 18, 2019

This morning we celebrate our Holy Week Chrism Mass 2019. We celebrate this Chrism Mass just three days removed from the tragic fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

We pray in solidarity with Parisians and people around the world who treasure this beautiful expression in art and architecture of the Catholic faith and the Catholic soul. We give profound thanks to our ecumenical and interfaith brothers and sisters and all people of good will who have expressed their compassion and solidarity.

So often in recent years, European nations have tried to separate their contemporary identity from their deeply Catholic roots. George Weigel diagnosed this well in his book *The Cube and the Cathedral*.

What we saw this week is that no matter how secularized these nations become, the depths of their Catholic roots in Catholic Worship, Catholic Mysticism and Catholic Art and Architecture are always present and cannot ultimately be denied, repressed or eliminated.

The French Catholic Historian Henri Daniel-Rops (1901-1965) once stated that historically just when it seems that the Catholic Faith is disappearing from France there is an explosive underground geyser of Catholic mission, spirit, history and mysticism ready to surge upward to the surface from the depths.

We saw this clearly on Monday as some of the most hardened atheists in the streets of Paris and around the world wept at the sight of the flames leaping from the spire and the roof of Notre Dame.

We pray at this Chrism Mass today that as the plans for the rebuilding of Notre Dame Cathedral develop so too may the Catholic Church in France, the “Eldest Daughter of the Church”, be rebuilt with the intercession of the great French Saints: Saint Denis (3rd Century), St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), St. Louis IX (1214-1270), St. Joan of Arc (1412-1431), St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) and St. Jane de Chantal (1572-1641), St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) and Sr. Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) and St. Claude de la Columbiere (1641-1682), St. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle (1651-1719), St. Louis de Montfort (1673-1716), St. John Eudes (1601-1680), St. Benedict Joseph Labre (1748-1783), St. Madeleine Sophie Barat (1779-1865), St. John Vianney (1786-1859) and St. Pierre Jean Eymard (1811-1868), Blessed Frederic Ozanam (1813-1853), St. Catherine Laboure (1806-1876), St. Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1879), St. Terese of Lisieux (1873-1897), St. Louis Martin (1823-1894) and St. Marie-Azelie Guerin (1831-1877), St. Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880-1906), St. Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916) and many others, including the Mother of the Church, Our Lady of Paris. Let us pray that the flames of the fire that burned in Notre Dame are replaced by the missionary fire of the Holy Spirit burning in hearts throughout France and the world.

Let me begin by thanking all our priests today. You are an inspiration to each other in the solidarity of your fraternity. You are an inspiration to your people. And you are an inspiration to me, Bishop Murphy, Bishop Andrzej, Bishop Henning, Bishop Coyle, Bishop Dunne and Bishop Wcela.

The Chrism Mass is a time to honor our priest jubilarians who celebrate priestly milestones and give thanks to God for the graces experienced in their faithful living of the priesthood.

We give thanks too for our newly ordained Bishop, Bishop Richard Henning, our newly ordained priest Fr. Leo Song and our newly incardinated priests Fr. Charlince Vendredy and Fr. Lennard Sabio.

Our prayers continue for the new Bishop of Columbus, Ohio, Bishop Robert Brennan. With Bishop Nelson Perez in Cleveland and Bishop Brennan in Columbus, we now refer to the Buckeye State as “Long Island West!”

We give thanks for the upcoming Ordination of permanent deacons on June 1. Those to be ordained are Michael Boldizar, Al Matousek, Joseph Guglielmo, Ivan Toro and Christopher Quinn.

We give thanks for the upcoming Ordination to the priesthood on June 22nd. Those to be ordained are Deacon Cody Bobick, Deacon Matt Browne, Deacon Kenneth Grooms, Deacon Nelson Marquez, Deacon Alexander Turpin and Deacon Roger Velasquez.

As we pray for a rich harvest of vocations to the priesthood at this Chrism Mass, we recognize the fine work of our vocation director Fr. Joe Fitzgerald and we pray for Fr. Sean Magaldi as he prepares to follow in the creative net-casting footsteps of Fr. Joe Fitzgerald, Fr. Brian Barr, Msgr. Tom Coogan, Msgr. Tom Harold and Msgr. Bill Koenig.

The Chrism Mass offers us the opportunity to pray for the souls of Bishop Kellenberg, Bishop McGann, Bishop McHugh and the souls of all the deceased auxiliary bishops and priests who have served in the Diocese of Rockville Centre since 1957 and those who served the Church on Long Island before the founding of the Diocese.

We remember in a special way at this Mass the priests who have died since our last Chrism Mass in 2018.

I want to thank all of our permanent deacons, both active and retired, their wives and their families who are serving our parishes with a great spirit of prayer and missionary dedication.

We also pray for the souls of permanent deacons and their wives and family members who have died and in a special way for those deacons and their family members who have died since our last Chrism Mass.

Today, as a presbyterate, we renew the promises of our commitment to the priesthood and the Holy Spirit breathes through the oils we use to celebrate the sacraments.

Together, as a presbyterate we celebrate with the people we serve the signs of our times in Holy Week 2019, the signs of opportunity for *dramatic missionary growth* and its relationship to the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

What are some of these signs? I offer three among many.

Sign of the Times #1: The presence of the Heart of the Holy Cure of Ars at Cure of Ars parish.

On April 11th, thanks to the hospitality and fraternal charity of Msgr. Frank Caldwell, Fr. Zach Callahan and Fr. Henry Leuthardt, many of us gathered at Cure of Ars parish to adore the Blessed Sacrament and to reverence the Priestly Heart of the Holy Cure of Ars.

We were treated to a meditation by Fr. George Rutler whose capacity for Chestertonian paradox and historical synthesis is unsurpassed. In *The Cure of Ars Today*, Fr. Rutler writes: “The love of a priest is the unbounded love of the priest for his priesthood, which is what he meant when he called the priesthood the love of the heart of Jesus. By showing the people, even the youngest of the people, himself, he displayed the universal love of which the priest is mediator. In a world of rusty and broken clericalisms, he restored a shining sacerdotalism; if a clericist is a man who uses the priesthood, a sacerdotalist is a man who is used by the priesthood.”¹

As we adored the Blessed Sacrament in the Monstrance and revered the heart of the Cure positioned right below it, we asked that the Cure could intercede for our priestly hearts to discern the best way to continue to serve and reach out to the survivors of clergy sexual abuse and the best way we can be instruments of the purification, reform and sanctification of the Church we love.

¹ Fr. George William Rutler *The Cure of Ars Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 154.

St. John Vianney, the patron of priests, took over a faithless parish in post French Revolution France in a backwater location in Ars outside of Lyons.

Through his reverence at Mass and Eucharistic Devotion, his spirit of evangelization and catechesis, and his constant presence in the confessional, the Cure of Ars was the Divine Mercy instrument of a *dramatic missionary growth* that occurred against all the odds. Pilgrims from all over France and Europe would come to Ars to have their confession heard by this holy old priest.

The Cure of Ars had been warned that the spiritual life of the parish in Ars was at an all time low and that he would face almost insurmountable challenges.

We may at times feel the same way about the pastoral challenges we face and the painful moments the Church has experienced since last August. Still, St. John Vianney's example stirs our hope.

His priestly virtue, holiness and humility conquered Ars and sent apostolic vibrations through Europe and the rest of the world that last to this day.

While we live in a different country, different culture and different moment of history, the fundamentals of priestly identity and spirituality remain the same and can be summarized by a short section from the August 4th St. John Vianney Memorial Office of Readings: "Prayer is nothing but union with God. When one has a heart that is pure and united with God, he is given a kind of serenity and sweetness that makes him ecstatic, a light that surrounds him with marvelous brightness."

And finally, for a moment, imagine the pastoral conversations being held in heaven between the Cure of Ars and Msgr. Jim McDonald. They were like charges in many ways and unlike charges in many other ways. One thing they shared was an unbelievable priestly generosity with the Sacrament of Penance and we thank them both for their inspiration at this Chrism Mass.

Sign of the Times #2: The Canonization of Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman

With the recent approval of a second miracle, we heard in February that John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-1890) will be canonized in the near future.

Newman has often been called the Father of the Second Vatican Council. On the one hand his conversion to the Catholic Church expressed in *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864-1865) was based on his intellect being “deep in history”, immersed in the past, the writings of the Fathers and the doctrine of Apostolic Succession.

On the other hand, his intellect was immersed in the future. He understood that the Deposit of Faith was complete with the death of the last Apostle but he also knew that the Deposit of Faith could be understood more deeply over time as he expressed in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) and his *Grammar of Assent* (1870).

In addition to being one of the most far-sighted theologians in history, he was a great English language stylist as excerpts from the *Apologia* and *The Idea of a University* (1852 and 1858) are included in all the major anthologies of English Literature.

In the late 1980s, I was walking at Catholic University from a Caldwell Hall class past the National Shrine with Fr. Avery Dulles. Earnest seminarian that I was, I asked him: “Fr. Dulles, you knew most of the theologians of the Second Vatican Council. Which ones especially impressed you for their holiness?”

As he walked lankily along, he paused and then suddenly gave me that knowing and wry smile, and said: “On the whole, they are a contentious lot!”

John Henry Cardinal Newman had his share of theological contention. The *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* was provoked from the theological attacks he experienced because of his decision to become a Catholic.

But perhaps one among the many reasons he is being canonized is that he lived the point made by Catholic historian Christopher Dawson that true Church reform and authentic theological development are only lasting and effective when driven by a spirit of contemplative prayer and charity rather than a spirit of bitter criticism.

At a Prayer Vigil on the Eve of the Beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman in Hyde Park (London) on September 18th 2010, Pope Benedict gave this summary of Cardinal Newman's perennial relevance and importance (it is a long quote but very much worth hearing in its entirety):

Let me begin by recalling that Newman, by his own account, traced the course of his whole life back to a powerful experience of conversion which he had as a young man. It was an immediate experience of the truth of God's word, of the objective reality of Christian revelation as handed down in the Church. This experience, at once religious and intellectual, would inspire his vocation to be a minister of the Gospel, his discernment of the source of authoritative teaching in the Church of God, and his zeal for the renewal of ecclesial life in fidelity to the apostolic tradition. At the end of his life, Newman would describe his life's work as a struggle against the growing tendency to view religion as a purely private and subjective matter, a question of personal opinion. Here is the first lesson we can learn from his life: in our day, when an intellectual and moral relativism threatens to sap the very foundations of our society, Newman reminds us that, as men and women made in the image and likeness of God, we were created to know the truth, to find in that truth our ultimate freedom and the fulfilment of our deepest human aspirations. In a word, we are meant to know Christ, who is himself "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6).

Newman's life also teaches us that passion for the truth, intellectual honesty and genuine conversion are costly. The truth that sets us free cannot be kept to ourselves; it calls for testimony, it begs to be heard, and in the end its convincing power comes from itself and not from the human eloquence or arguments in which it may be couched. Not far from here, at Tyburn, great numbers of our brothers and sisters died for the faith; the witness of their fidelity to the end was ever more powerful than the inspired words that so many of them spoke before surrendering everything to the Lord. In our own time, the price to be paid for fidelity to the Gospel is no longer being hanged, drawn and quartered but it often involves being dismissed out of hand, ridiculed or parodied. And yet, the Church cannot withdraw from the task of proclaiming Christ and his Gospel as saving truth, the source of our ultimate happiness as individuals and as the foundation of a just and humane society.

Finally, Newman teaches us that if we have accepted the truth of Christ and committed our lives to him, there can be no separation between what we believe and the way we live our lives. Our every thought, word and action must be directed to the glory of God and the spread of his Kingdom. Newman understood this, and was the great champion of the prophetic office of the Christian laity. He saw clearly that we do not so much accept the truth in a purely intellectual act as embrace it in a spiritual dynamic that penetrates to the core of our being. Truth is passed on not merely by formal teaching, important as that is, but also by the witness of lives lived in integrity, fidelity and holiness; those who live in and by the truth instinctively recognize what is false and, precisely as false, inimical to the beauty and goodness which accompany the splendour of truth, *veritatis splendor*.

Pope Benedict XVI's analysis of Newman's commitment to objective truth connects completely with his recent analysis of the historical roots of the clergy sexual abuse crisis having its ultimate foundation in the *zeitgeist* of moral relativism.

Brothers, in a post Roe vs. Wade (1973), a post Obergefell vs. Hodges (2015), and a post New York State Reproductive Health Act (2019) world, thank you for the courageous way you celebrate, articulate and live the compassionate Catholic Splendor of Truth as Catholic priests and as Catholic deacons.

As Pope Benedict says, we may often be “dismissed out of hand, ridiculed and parodied” for the truths we stand for and express but remember the reverse logic of the Beatitudes and remember that these experiences are among our finest Cross-embracing hours as Catholic priests and deacons.

In the end, the dictatorship of relativism will ultimately be defeated by Truth, Charity and Holiness and our common pursuit of a civilization of love.

We ask soon to be Saint John Henry Newman to intercede for each one of us – that our living of the priesthood may be holy, theologically faithful to the Magisterium and courageous.

Sign of the Times #3: We celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Amazing Mets winning the 1969 World Series.

In Spring Training of 1969, Tom Seaver was coming off a 16 win season and Jerry Koosman was coming off a 19 win season. Still, the New York Mets, were far from “amazing.”

Can anyone remember the catcher on that team? Yes, Jerry Grote: an outstanding defensive catcher with a gun to second base and a gift for guiding young pitchers.

One day in Spring Training 1969, Jerry Grote was talking to a young pitching staff that was coming into its own – Tom Seaver, Jerry Koosman, Gary Gentry, (if you remember the great Nolan Ryan’s control was still a bit shaky!) – and he said to them: “I think we can win the whole thing this year!...I think we can win the whole thing this year!”

This was odd coming from Jerry Grote – a steady, reliable, mature player not known for hyperbole or overstatement.

So what was the reaction of the young pitching staff? Seaver, Koosman and Gentry simultaneously told their catcher Jerry Grote that he was crazy, absolutely crazy!

But that solid, steady, reliable catcher Jerry Grote was right. He saw something in Spring training that Seaver, Koosman and Gentry did not yet see. And his comment stuck like a burr in each one of them.

Even when they were 10 games back behind the Cubs in August of 1969, the tumblers began to fall into line with the leadership of manager Gil Hodges and all that young Met talent along with some seasoned veterans like Tommie Agee, Don Clendenon, and Buddy Harrelson began to gell.

Seaver says: “As we went through the course of the season, we as individuals began to get on board. Maybe Grote isn’t crazy. Everyone started to believe and the thing steamrolled.” And Seaver pinpointed a specific clutch comeback win against the Dodgers in August where he himself began to believe.

When they made it to the World Series, they faced the unbeatable Baltimore Orioles who had such Hall of Famers as Brooks Robinson, Jim Palmer and Boog Powell.

The Mets lost the first game to Baltimore 5-3 but as they were coming off the field, Don Clendenon came over to Seaver and said with a confident intuition, “We’re going to beat them!”²

And as we know the rest is history. The Mets swept the next four games. Tom Seaver became “Tom Terrific” and a baseball Hall of Famer,

And the New York Mets known for their Shakespearean Comedy of Errors in the early 60s became the “Amazin Mets” who taught us the phrase “Ya gotta believe...Ya gotta believe!”

Can you believe that it will be 50 years in September 2019 that the Amazin Mets won the World Series and turned us all into believers? I calculate that I was a believing 4th grader at the time!

Why am I indulging in this bit of nostalgic baseball history at this Chrism Mass?

Because the 1969 NY Mets have something to teach the Catholic Church on Long Island fifty years later in 2019.

Ya Gotta Believe, Ya Gotta Believe – in *Dramatic Missionary Growth*, the missionary identity and nature of our Church.

In short, *Ya gotta truly believe and deeply believe* in what we believe as Catholics. While we acknowledge realistically the challenges of the culture and the challenges of the times, we also acknowledge that to give up on *dramatic missionary growth* is a theological heresy against the Catholic Church’s ecclesiology and missiology.

As your Bishop, as a servant successor of the Apostles, my role is similar to the role of Jerry Grote.

² This material is summarized from a *One-on-One* Tom Seaver-Dick Schapp interview available on Youtube.

I am saying that *dramatic missionary growth* on Long Island is not only possible in the extraordinarily painful times the Church is going through but that it is percolating and occurring right in front of us! There are so many signs of it.

All *dramatic missionary growth* in every moment of Church history passes directly through the Cross of Christ. It is happening and “Ya gotta believe”!

In his Exhortation *The Sacrament of Charity*, Pope Benedict XVI made this wise observation about Church history and peak periods of effective evangelization: “Every great reform (every compelling movement of evangelization) has in some way been linked to the rediscovery of belief in the Lord’s Eucharistic presence among his people.”

Thanks to you the priests and deacons of Long Island for the contemplatively biblical and Eucharistic missionary spirit with which you are evangelizing all of Long Island!

Today at this Chrism Mass, we celebrate these signs of the times and open our eyes and hearts to them. We celebrate the movement of the Holy Spirit in our parishes. We celebrate the torrent of Divine Mercy that flows from the Sacred Oils we bless.

We remember Pope Francis’ words in *Rejoice and Be Glad*: “Do not be afraid of holiness...The Lord wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence.”

We remember our own call to holiness and mission as we renew our priestly promises together.

We embrace our call to a humble paschal mystery kenosis as priests, a kenosis that embraces the evangelizing power of the Cross and helps kick start a new era of *dramatic missionary growth* on Long Island and beyond.