

Isaiah 61. 1-3, 6, 8-9;  
Revelation 1. 5-8;  
John 4.16-21

## Chrism Mass Sermon for the See of Beverley 2023

“Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Jesus quotes from the prophecy of Isaiah in quite an audacious way, having walked into the synagogue “as was his custom”. He finds his desired text from within the scroll and begins: “The spirit of the Lord has been given to me ...” Is it not equally audacious for us to have these passages from the Prophets and Gospels read today, during this Mass? Today, as the people of God in this place, we boldly associate ourselves with these texts. Today, while remembering that they were first uttered by Isaiah, then repeated by Jesus, we re-read them deliberately in the context of the renewal of ordination vows and the blessing of oils.

Holy people and sacred oils sent out and used to:  
proclaim good news to the poor  
proclaim liberty to the captives and  
recovering of sight to the blind,  
set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

Yes, it is audacious! But that is what we ask of God – and accept from God – when we ordain people to these sacred ministries. In all three ordination services (of deacon, priest and bishop) we align ourselves with and, if you like, plug the individuals (called and set apart) into, Jesus Christ’s character and ministry. Further, the Church, in all three ordination services, calls upon the Holy Spirit to fill the new deacons, priests and bishops with “grace and power” so that, in our own time and place, the scriptures may be fulfilled in the hearing of all amongst whom they are sent. Our deacons, priests and bishops, You, my fellow deacons, priests and bishops, plugged into Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit enable us and so many others to know and call God “Father.” You, equipped with the sacred oils, the sacraments of the church, the teaching and example of the saints and, above all, Holy Scripture, proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives and, recovering of sight to the blind, set at liberty those who are oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

But today is *not* just about our ordained, sacred ministers and their participation in the ongoing salvific ministry of Our Lord. For, the second part of the Prophet Isaiah’s declaration was directed towards the whole People of God. He switches from the first person, “The spirit of the Lord has been given to me...” to the second and third person: “But you, *you* will be named ‘priests of the Lord’, they will call you ‘ministers of our God’.  
I reward them faithfully  
and make an everlasting covenant with them.  
Their race will be famous throughout the nations,  
their descendants throughout the peoples.  
All who see them will admit  
that they are a race whom the Lord has blessed.”

The whole people of God, together, as a race that “will be famous throughout the nations”, a race “whom the Lord has blessed” will, collectively, be named “Priests of the Lord.” Or, as our reading from the Revelation to St John reminds us: “He loves us and has washed away our sins with his blood, and made us a line of kings, priests to serve his God and Father”. The everlasting covenant is sealed for us in Baptism: in baptism each and every Christian passes through the waters of death and rises to new life in Christ. In baptism people are born again of water and the Spirit and anointed with sacred oil. At Baptism the priest prays: “Renewed in your image ... may they continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Today is about our deacons, priests and bishops. Today is about the sacred oils that enable them to fulfil their calling. Today is about the whole people of God from whom these sacred ministers are called.

Above all, however, today is about the kingship of the universal high priest, Jesus Christ – through him, we are taught, “all things came into being”.

*“He came to what was his own ... and all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”<sup>1</sup>*

Today, the scripture has been fulfilled in your presence.

Pope Benedict XVI, put it like this:

“What did Jesus actually bring? ... What has he brought? The answer is very simple. God. He has brought God... and now we know his face ... now we know the path we human beings have to take in this world.”<sup>2</sup>

Do we have the courage individually and collectively to say, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me?” Do we have the audacity to say individually and collectively, “This scripture is being fulfilled today in your hearing.”? What does the church actually bring? What have we brought? The answer should be simple: God. Today’s Mass reminds us – *we are to bring God*, that others may know his face. Pray for your bishops, priests and deacons. Pray earnestly for all the baptized. That all people may have the opportunity to be anointed with sacred oil and the sweet, glorious aroma of salvation. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> John 1.12

<sup>2</sup> Jesus of Nazareth, Bloomsbury, 2007, p 44