

## Homily at the Mass of Chrism by Archbishop Kevin McDonald on Maundy Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2007 at St George's Cathedral, Southwark

We gather together today as members of the Body of Christ. We have been called, chosen, anointed, and are sons and daughters of God. Together we have listened to God's word speaking to each of us, and it has said:

"The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me for He has anointed me – to give good news to the poor – to proclaim liberty and freedom, to comfort those who mourn – you will be made priests of the Lord and ministers of our God."

Those words, as I say, are addressed to all of us. In a particular way they are addressed to those of us who exercise the ministerial priesthood and renew our commitment today, but it is important that all of us hear those words and hear the particular message that is being communicated to us, whether we belong to the ranks of those who are ordained or whether we share in the priesthood of all the baptised.

We have heard these words before, but there are some words in the scriptures that we need constantly to hear afresh in order to deepen our confidence and faith – "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me." I say this especially this year when we have been reflecting and consulting about the future, trying to discern where God is leading us, trying to identify the signs of the times and to interpret the new and changing situation in which we live. This is something the Church has been encouraging us to do since the turn of the millennium, and very specifically in Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. Things change so quickly, attitudes, mindsets, and I was pleased to receive support and encouragement from the Holy See for our initiative. It said:

"Cardinal Re notes your positive desire to involve, in this initial process of discernment, all the faithful of the Archdiocese in order to reflect on how to use, share and develop the local resources for evangelisation in this particular time which is so different from the past."

And the initial process of discernment will be followed by others the nature of which I hope will grow organically out of the first.

The world *has* changed so greatly in a very short time. We face questions and issues that either never occurred, or never surfaced, until quite recently: issues that would have shocked or alarmed people who went before us. A smaller, globalised world, secularised but constantly searching for authentic spirituality; and technological revolutions that have

transformed the way we live. Add to this the ever-present reality of human suffering, most conspicuously because of war and injustice, the threats to human life and the threat to the environment.

We're called to confront the challenges of these times, our times, and each of you here, and all in our diocese, have a special role to play. We must believe that – acknowledge the gift and call that is yours: the "Spirit of the Lord has been given to me for He has anointed me." Anointed for a special role and purpose. In the famous Meditation of Cardinal Newman, he talks about how each of us is a link in a chain; we may not fully *understand* what our unique role and purpose is, but one day it will be made clear to us.

Recently I re-read the spiritual classic "Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence", which is really a prolonged meditation on the fact that all that is asked of us is to respond to God's will in the present moment in the state of life that we are in. God will make sense of it all. And it may not matter if what God is doing in my life, or calling me to do, seems to my limited understanding to conflict with what He is doing in the life of someone else. We have to be true to the call that we have heard within the Church, guided by its sure and constant teaching, and always in a spirit of openness to the new things God asks of us, the new vision and new insights.

Crucially we need to work *together* in a spirit of mutual respect and co-operation. The Church, after all, is God's gift: it's the Body of Christ present in the world of which, as I've said, we are members. It's bigger than any ideas we can formulate, bigger than any schemes or strategies we may develop and today's liturgy reminds us of that. The blessing of the oils - of the sick, of catechumens, of chrism - reminds us priests that we are agents of *God's* action in the world, ministers of something much greater than we are. That is the joy of priesthood. And the renewal of priestly commitment is renewal of commitment to being instruments of God's action in the world. God calls us to something much greater than our own choices, our own schemes and devisings, calls us to follow Him to new pastures and to new vineyards but always watered by the same Spirit that was poured out at Pentecost and is breathed onto the oils we bless today.

So let us reflect and plan for the future, but not like politicians who pretend to have solutions when we all know they haven't. We look to the future with confidence that what we do, in obedience to God's will, will be blessed and will be part of that bigger picture which is the Kingdom of God, which we glimpse sometimes vividly, sometimes fleetingly but which is His work in which we all of us have the honour and privilege to share.