

Mass of the Chrism 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This gathering of lay people, religious, priests and deacons with their bishop, symbolises and expresses the unity of the Church in all its richness and variety - the community of God's faithful people called together by the Holy Spirit, "the Lord and giver of life", and given the mission to proclaim the gospel in the world of our time.

By virtue of our baptism we are pre-eminently a priestly people, sharing in the one priesthood of Christ, the one and eternal High Priest anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. In the first reading this morning we heard the promise made by God through the prophet Isaiah: "But you, you will be named priests of the Lord". And St. John proclaims that in Christ this promise is fulfilled because Christ has made us "... a line of kings, priests to serve his God and Father." Every one of us who is baptised is called to take part in proclaiming the Gospel to the society and world in which we live and work. We do it both by what we say but especially by the witness of our lives. This mission to the secular world is, first of all the particular vocation of you, the laity, who live, work and take your leisure day by day in secular society. You fulfil your vocation, not only as individuals but as members of the community of faith, because God wants us to make our journey of faith, not as isolated individuals, but together, as members of his family. It is that togetherness, that communion of heart and mind, which helps us grow in unity with each other and with him, united in the Spirit.

And as we shall hear in the Preface of today's Mass, it is from this royal priesthood of all the baptised, that Christ freely chooses some men to share his sacred ministry through the laying on of hands, the prayer of consecration and the outpouring of the same Spirit. These are called to share in a special way the threefold ministry of Christ as priest, prophet and king, and to represent him as head and shepherd of the Church. As the shepherds of the Church, our vocation is to model ourselves on the person and life of Christ the Good Shepherd. Through our priestly ministry we nourish you, God's people, by word and sacrament, serve you through pastoral care, and recognise and promote the proper mission of the laity within the world.

Those of us who are ordained must never forget that the good that we do comes not so much from ourselves and our own efforts but from the gift of God's grace. The authority and power given to us through the laying on of hands and the gift of the Holy Spirit is always and only to be used in the service of God's people. Our calling is not to domination, nor to lording it over others. It's a call to humble service after the example of the Good Shepherd. "I came not to be served, but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many." In following humbly and generously the way of the Lord, we do so specifically in representing to his Church, his flock, the person of Jesus Christ as Head and Shepherd.

Carrying out and fulfilling the mission of the Church needs the collaborative effort of every member of the Church, each according to the gifts he or she has been given by the Holy Spirit. Or to put it in the words of Pope Benedict, we have a "co-responsibility" in carrying out that mission, and a responsibility too for the well-being of each other. The fact of the matter is that whether we recognise it or not, whether it is obvious to others or not, we are all, to some extent, broken and wounded people much in need of the healing love, compassion and mercy of God, and the support and encouragement of one another. It's together, not as isolated individuals, that we make our journey of faith; recognising and rejoicing in each other's gifts, and helping and encouraging each other, especially in times of difficulty and distress. And we are called too, to be a joyful people, filled with hope and trust in his providence so that united as one body we can proclaim to the world the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Over the nearly nine years now, that I've been your Archbishop, what has encouraged me so much is the vibrancy of our parish communities and all the different initiatives taken to promote the formation and training of catechists, working with each other to support and help our young people, and overall to find ways of fulfilling the call of the Church to evangelise the very secular society in which we live.

So today gives me the opportunity to thank you, the laity for your generous co-operation and for the part you play in building up the Church and fulfilling the Church's mission in so many ways in your parish communities and involvement in the local

community. And I thank particularly those of you involved in public office either locally or nationally. I thank you, the Religious, for your presence in the Diocese and for all that you do to build up and sustain the Church. Thank you for your perseverance and for the sign you give to all of us of total dedication to the values of the Gospel by your following of the evangelical counsels. And I thank you, my brother priests and deacons, who are in a very special way co-workers with me in the building up of the Body of Christ in this Archdiocese of Southwark. I want you to know that I very much appreciate all that you do in serving the people you have been sent to serve, and for the help and support you give me in fulfilling my task as Archbishop. I thank you all for striving day by day to be faithful to Christ and the vocation he has given to each one of you so that you can share in bringing the Gospel message to those who have not yet heard it.

So we give thanks today to the God who has given us his only Son to be our Way, our Truth and our Life, and who has blessed us in so many ways; to God who has given us the gift of each other in all our uniqueness and variety, in all our strengths and weaknesses, in all our joys and sorrows. We ask him to give us the grace and strength to continue our journey together, strengthened by the grace of the sacraments, firm in faith, filled with hope and empowered by that divine love to follow him wherever he may lead us.