

**Chrism Mass**  
**Homily By Bishop Felipe J. Estévez**  
**Cathedral Basilica of Saint Augustine**  
**April 17, 2019**

Today I want to celebrate the faithfulness of priests and laity... of deacons, religious, and seminarians in the life of the Church today. Let us praise the Holy Spirit who empowers us to persevere as we follow the steps of the Lord Jesus whom Scripture calls the “faithful witness.”

Life has been very difficult for us since our last Chrism Mass. You do not need me to go into details for you know it very well. However, in spite of the shock of the scandals, the many denunciations of abuses, our ministers remained serving, our seminarians persevered, our parishes and schools kept providing, our charities kept actively giving. Yes, our mission is being accomplished day by day, sustained literally by the grace of the Lord! We ask for his help as we pray daily: “God come to my assistance...Lord make haste to help me.”

The virtue of fortitude sustains a love that is patient. A love that, as Saint Paul writes, “is always ready...to endure whatever comes.” Whatever! Blessed Charles de Foucault would ask every day for the grace to be ready to accept all. None of us knows how long this intensive purification of the Catholic Church will take or how intensive the public scrutiny of the Church’s clergy will be. Beloved, let us draw strength from the faithful witnessing of the first Christians of Northern Florida, usually referred to as the “Florida Martyrs” who, in spite of the awful atrocities they had to face, the power of the Cross shone gloriously in them. Today, let us also lift high the Cross as a unified body, the “totus Christus” in the words of Saint Augustine.

Today the bishop and priests renew our priestly promises and the Christian assembly prays for three intentions: that the Lord pours out his gifts abundantly on the priests, that to the priests may be faithful, and that the priests successfully lead the faithful to Christ, the High Priest.

Every priest knows that on the day of our priestly ordination the ceremony started with the solemn singing of the *Veni Creator Spiritus*. It was very appropriate since each ordinandi must first seek the power, the force of the Spirit to sustain him in his chaste and faithful promise of celibacy and obedience. The *Veni Creator Spiritus* states: **o guide our minds with the blest light, with love our hearts inflame; and with thy strength, which never decays confirm our mortal frame.**

The Holy Spirit is the only power we can truly rely on in our priestly life. Our intelligence and all our talents do not suffice. As St. Paul said: “our Gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and the Holy Spirit” (1 Tess 1, 5). Our fidelity relies on the power of the Spirit which renders our ministry fruitful in bringing souls to Christ. Paul, in his letter to Timothy, confides, “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (2 Tim 1:7). And “Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us” (Rom 8:26). And for St Paul, even our weakness, our limitations, our fears, and our anxieties can be paradoxically a source of strength and daring trust in the Spirit who renews all things for the best. The lyrics of Bukas Palad’s song, *Breath of God* come to mind: “Breathe on me, Breath of God, till my heart is pure,

until with you I have one will: to live and to endure.” St Augustin would pray along the same lines: “Strengthen me oh Holy Spirit to defend all that is holy.”

Celibacy is not a commandment but a gift of self out of love for the Lord and His Spouse, the Church. Each of us priests and seminarians have received a special grace, as a gift “not all men can receive this saying but only to those whom it is given” (Mt 19, 11). A gift we have freely embraced ...this charism given by the Spirit comes with the grace of fidelity. It is only possible to succeed through constant prayer and vigilance for it is not the media but the Bible which depicted individuals and entire cities taken by the devastating power of sexual disorder.

As Father Cantalamessa has written: Jesus redeems human sexuality through the cross by calling us to share his struggle, so we share in his victory. We began our seminary studies and our priestly journey by giving our love, the gift of self and along the road one has to be ready to suffer for love to be real. Like Samuel, we have learned to say “Here I am Lord, you called me” not only once, twice or three times, but many times. A faithful priest is one who has been tested many times. This is the reason for “elder” to be one of the early titles for priests. A priest was called elder because he had been found faithful through suffering for the Church and on account of the Church, yet witnessing the joy and deep intimacy with the Lord in a magnanimous generosity of mature love for the dear neighbor.

It is a source of joy for us all that in a few weeks, at the Convocation, three priests will be especially honored for their faithful witness: one for his 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary and two others for their silver anniversary. On May 4, four men will also become priests through the anointing of the Holy Chrism – the Holy Spirit – which will be consecrated today. Fidelity is worthy of renewal!

Properly speaking, the Chrism Mass should take place tomorrow, Holy Thursday, in the morning as the beginning of the Sacred Triduum having the Mass of the Lord’s Supper in the evening. A priest is the gift of the love of Christ for his people. In essence, the priest lives from the Eucharist in the continuity of the legacy of the Last Supper when the Lord entrusted the 12 Apostles with the sacred mandate of offering the memorial of his sacrifice for all of us.

As St Francis of Assisi said to priests: **see your dignity, my priests brothers and be holy because He is holy. As the Lord God has honored you above all others because of this ministry, for your part love, revere and honor Him above all others.”**