

Feast of St. Matthias – Chrism Mass
The Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine
by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
May 14, 2020

The postponement of the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine, due to the COVID-19 emergency, makes me wonder what it must have been like for the second bishop of St. Augustine, John Moore, when the Cathedral was totally destroyed by fire on April 12, 1887. There was no Cathedral to celebrate Mass for at least one and a half years. In comparison, our situation is not as bad as it could have been. COVID-19 as menacing as it is has not kept us from celebrating the Chrism Mass today.

All along we have been saying to one another: Be not afraid. Jesus often said, “I will be with you at all times.” The great Teresa of Avila said, “Todo pasa – solo Dios queda. A quien Dios tiene nada le falta” – “Everything passes, only God remains, the one who has God lacks nothing.”

Inspired by the late Father Raymond Brown, SS, a priest of the Diocese of St. Augustine, I would like to outline three points: There is but one priest – all, the entire people of God are priests. Some of the baptized are chosen to be priests. At first, this sounds like a riddle, but the readings of the Mass clarify this in a luminous way.

- A. There is but one priest, and his name is Jesus Christ, the Lord. The preaching of the 11 Apostles and Matthias was the Kerygma: Jesus – who was killed unjustly, is risen. He is the Savior, Lord, believe and convert.

As the Gospel proclaims, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he anointed me. This Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Alpha and the Omega – the one who is and was and who is to come, the Almighty!

Our secularist society holds that religion is ok as long as it remains private and does not make a real difference in the affairs of the public. But for us, the Name of Jesus Christ is essential for the city. That is the whole point of St. Augustine when he wrote *The City of God*. In God, we trust is real – and it was for our founding fathers of this great nation. Because Jesus Christ is the victor over death, all our citizens are all faced with the important choice: to believe and be saved or not to believe in him. Our supreme vocation is to evangelize: to propose with vigor the name of Jesus Christ to all!

This proclamation is the truth of the Scriptures, and it is proclaimed resoundingly today from this first parish of our country. The Martyrs of La Florida died for it. We are here simply because He is alive, as alive as St. Mary Magdalene heard her name near the tomb, and Cleophas and his companion recognized Him in the breaking of the bread. Because He is – here we are. The worst pandemic does not make us afraid because, in Him, we have life eternal. Even if the worst happens to us, He is our best destiny!

- B. The entire people of God are a priestly people. The prophet Isaiah's teaching is so true, "You yourselves shall be named priests of the Lord, ministers of our God shall you be called." On the sacred day of your baptism, the following words were said to you as the priest or deacon anointed your forehead: "The God of power and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... now anoints you with the chrism of salvation, so that united with his people, you may remain forever a member of Christ who is priest, prophet, and king."

Our journey begins with our baptism, and in our parishes, the catechumens of our RCIA do wait with real expectation for the holy oil of the catechumens to strengthen them to turn away from evil, temptation, and sin. Our journey is a way, a way that has a most happy term. But for those in this critical time of the pandemic, the oil of the sick is how Jesus reaches out his love to those who are frail, and those near death. How could we forget today those taken by COVID-19 and in their loneliness need desperately the visit of the priest with the oils (the holy anointing) that bring them the comfort of the merciful Good Shepherd.

- C. Some brothers, taken from the people of God, are so blessed that the love of Christ reaches out to them with a unique spousal love, called to be priests of the new covenant by the imposition of hands of a successor of the Apostles.

Today we give thanks for priests in our midst and for those throughout our 61 parishes and missions who serve in this particular church, the Diocese of St. Augustine. We are all grateful for their perseverance in serving the priestly people of God with selfless care. We celebrate with anticipation in a few weeks when Maurice, Jared, Anthony, Chris, Mason, and Clay will come to this cathedral with their immediate family to be ordained priests. Their hands will be anointed with the holy Chrism consecrated today. The sacrament of holy orders will be given to them by the imposition of hands by the bishop and priests for the glory of the triune God.

- D. We chose this date to celebrate the Chrism Mass because of the apostolic feast of St. Matthias. Deacon Keith Fournier has reminded us by quoting St. Clement of Alexandria, who said that Matthias was not chosen by Jesus for who he was, but for what Jesus foresaw he would become. He was elected, not because he was worthy, but that he would become worthy. Matthias must have felt like a latecomer, an afterthought. At times we resent the newcomer, but the apostolic community was not complete without this newcomer. A coin in the lot made the difference: For the eleven Apostles, it was God's choice, as simple as that. And Joseph Barsabbas-Justus the one left behind, I wonder – did he feel relieved that his life was to go on without any new challenging adventure, but to go on simply to continue witnessing Christ right there in his ordinary milieu? Nothing is said of him by anybody.

Last Sunday, our country celebrated Mother's Day, and I ask you to join me in recognizing our mothers present in this assembly with the gratitude of us all. Let us all also honor the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ – Mary of Nazareth – who conceived the Lord in her Immaculate Heart by the Holy Spirit, who nursed him with love beyond all telling. Yesterday we invoked her as Our Lady of Fatima, and today let us turn to her under the title of Our Lady of La Leche and simply honor her by praying:

Hail, Mary, full of grace,

the Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou amongst women

and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

pray for us sinners,

now and at the hour of our death.

Amen.