

Chrism Mass 2021 Homily
The Year of St. Joseph
Most Reverend John O. Barres
Diocese of Rockville Centre
St. Agnes Cathedral
Tuesday, March 30, 2021

I. Introduction

This afternoon, in the midst of Holy Week, we gather for our Chrism Mass 2021. This annual celebration of the Eucharist at our Cathedral manifests the communion we have as the Church of Rockville Centre, and it is good that we are here!

A great number of people are participating virtually through our Catholic Faith Network, and thanks be to God, this year so many priests can concelebrate at St. Agnes. How different from last year! It is yet another sign of hope that causes us to *sing* with the Psalmist *the goodness of the Lord!*

At the Chrism Mass, we bless the Oil of Catechumens and the Oil of the Sick, and we consecrate the Sacred Chrism. The rite is powerful. Oils are brought forth, the Holy Spirit is outpoured, and the beauty and power of our sacramental life is again made clear: God takes a thing of the earth – humble oil - and sets it apart, so that, through the holy oils, He can encounter His people.

During the Chrism Mass, our priests also renew their priestly promises. This is done close to Holy Thursday, the day when Our Lord conferred the priesthood on his Apostles.

Brothers, like the holy oils, God has set us apart, so that, through us, unworthy though we are, He might encounter His people. He has called us to participate in the one priesthood of Christ, and what a privilege it is to renew once more our commitment to Him who has been so good to us!

May the renewal of our vocational promises today be a renewal of our commitment to evangelize in every chapter of our Chapter 11 experience and at every moment of our lives.

II. Gratitude

At this Chrism Mass, when the gift of priesthood is celebrated, let me begin by thanking our priests.

Brothers, we have an exceptional presbyterate. You are an inspiration to each other in the solidarity, humility, and magnanimity of your fraternity.

You are an inspiration to our people as you continue to model courage, charity, self-possession, holiness and mission during these COVID-19 times of tragedy, trauma, and upheaval.

In this most difficult year you have *brought glad tidings to the lowly*. You have *healed the brokenhearted*. You have *comforted those who mourn*.

Brothers, you are an inspiration to me and to all you serve! As your Diocesan Bishop and a Successor of the Apostles, I am grateful to serve you and to serve among you.

In a special way, I express gratitude for the ministry of our auxiliary Bishops, who serve and who selflessly give themselves to the Church on Long Island.

I thank, too, our dedicated deacons who live their *diakonia* in our parishes and in various apostolates. Brothers, your commitment to service is a gift to the Church in Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

Allow me to voice our collective thanks for Bishop Murphy and our retired Bishops, priests, and deacons. Brothers, thank you for your *faithful witness*. We are blessed to be beneficiaries of your continued ministry, your precious and hard-earned wisdom, and your fervent prayer.

At every Mass we remember those who have gone before us, and at this Chrism Mass, we pray for the souls of our deceased bishops, priests, deacons and their families. May God grant them light and peace.

The Chrism Mass is a time to pray for Pope Francis and be in solidarity with his spirit of global mission and universal fraternity. That spirit was palpable during his recent Apostolic Journey to Iraq. He brought joy and hope - he brought Christ - to the people of Iraq. May the Holy Father's example in Baghdad, Ur, and Mosul inspire us to be bold evangelizers and fervent messengers of hope!

The past year has been challenging, but the *Spirit of the Lord God has been upon us*. We experienced the Lord's closeness in many ways and especially in the ordinations celebrated at St. Agnes. They were moments when *the oil of gladness* was poured upon us.

We give thanks for the June 20, 2020 Priesthood Ordination of Fr. Rafal Borowiejski and Fr. John Crozier.

We are grateful for the June 29, 2020 Episcopal Consecration of Bishop Luis Romero and his pastoral leadership as our Vicar of Hispanic Ministry and Evangelization.

And we give thanks for the September 23, 2020 Ordination of Permanent Deacons Terrence Culhane, Michael Durso, Matthew Faughnan, Gregory Fewer, John Heverin, Ronald Lacs, Gerard Magaldi, George Sprance, and Vincent Sweeney.

We look forward to the upcoming May 22, 2021 Ordination to the Permanent Diaconate of Sean Cotter, Nilo Deleon, Thomas Depalo, Thomas Elliott, Paul Vastola, and Matthew Yellico.

As well, we anticipate the upcoming June 19, 2021 Ordination to the Priesthood of Deacons Joseph Catafago, Michael Lombardi, and Dominik Wegiel.

Brothers, our prayers are with you as you prepare for ordination.

Recalling the newly ordained and those to-be-ordained, we think too of our jubilarians who celebrate milestones. We give thanks to God for our priest jubilarians and the graces experienced in their faithful living of the priesthood, and we are grateful for our deacons who mark milestones in their service to the People of God.

At this Chrism Mass, and along with our transitional deacons and seminarians who are present today, we pray as a presbyterate for a rich harvest of vocations, most

especially to the priesthood, as we recommit to casting our nets in every parish, every Catholic and public school, and in every university on Long Island. May the Lord send laborers into His harvest!

III. St. Joseph and the Priesthood

We celebrate this Chrism Mass in the Year of St. Joseph. Like you, I am grateful to Pope Francis for proclaiming this Year of St. Joseph on December 8, 2020 and for his beautiful Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*.

Looking more intently with the Holy Father and the Universal Church at the humble and holy carpenter of Nazareth has been deeply enriching and inspired much creativity in our parishes.

At this Mass, let us consider how St. Joseph's role in Salvation History is connected to the Catholic priesthood.¹ There are so many dimensions of St. Joseph, the Guardian of the Redeemer and the Guardian of the Catholic priest, that we could explore.

I would like to focus on three in the life and pastoral ministry of the Catholic priest: St. Joseph, Dreamer and Craftsman; St. Joseph, Craftsman of the Interior Life; and St. Joseph, Patron of a Happy and Holy Death.

St. Joseph, Dreamer and Craftsman

In the Scriptures, St. Joseph is given guidance by dreams, and these dreams are translated into concrete decisions and actions on earth: Joseph *took* Mary into his home. Joseph *led* the Holy Family into Egypt.²

Throughout his life, Joseph would have constantly made dreams into reality. We can picture it. As a carpenter-craftsman, St. Joseph conceives a wood-working project. The project begins in his mind. It's an idea that moves to his heart and soul - because he gave his heart and soul to his work - and then is communicated and

¹ For an excellent treatment of "Saint Joseph and the Priesthood," see Fr. Gaston Courtois, *Before His Face: Meditations for Priests and Religious* (Volume III), (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 40-57. See also Donald H. Calloway, MIC, *Consecration to St. Joseph: The Wonders of Our Spiritual Father*, (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2020).

² We remember Pope Francis' powerful words in *Patris Corde* about St. Joseph's care and intercession for global refugees: "I consider Saint Joseph the special patron of all those forced to leave their native lands because of war, hatred, persecution and poverty." I express my gratitude to the priests of the Diocese of Rockville Centre for their inspirational pastoral charity to global refugees and non-documented immigrants on Long Island.

translated in the work of his hands. With precision he executes his vision. He shapes, carves, planes, nails, and finishes the wood project he set out to do. In Joseph's life, the Dreamer and the Craftsman are one.

St. Joseph intercedes for the Catholic parish priest by teaching us how to translate the pastoral and evangelization dreams and plans in our minds through our hearts and souls to our hands and into the daily reality of the lives of the parishioners we serve and reverence. He teaches us to be both Dreamers and Craftsmen.

Joseph also stands as a ready mentor.³ As a master craftsman, he knows well the art of patiently imparting his trade. He did so with Our Lord, teaching Jesus the skills of carpentry and acquainting him with the intricacies and nuances of wood.

As he mentored Jesus, so Joseph desires to mentor us. He wants to teach us his virtues. He wants to instruct us how to live our spiritual fatherhood to the full. He is ready. We must simply “go to Joseph” and receive his wisdom.

The mentorship of this great saint can guide us through our priestly life as his lessons remained with Jesus throughout his life. They were present to Our Lord during his public ministry and especially present at Golgotha.

Indeed, as the hammer and nails aligned Christ's hands and feet with the wood of that hastily constructed Cross, and his Sacred Body and Blood and his human sweat flowed across the Tree of Life, Joseph's lessons were being lived.

Though St. Joseph is not mentioned in the Gospels as being present at Calvary, he was present mystically. He was present in Jesus' carpentry-mentoring memories and flashbacks as His Body was configured to wood. He was present with Jesus on the Cross. Thus, as Jesus called upon God the Father from the Cross, we hear, too, a beautiful echo of God the Father on earth - St. Joseph.

If we are mentored by his fatherhood and virtues, so, too, will St. Joseph and his lessons be with us, especially in those challenging moments of ministry when we are asked to love to the end.

³ St. Joseph is also a powerful intercessor for young people discerning their work, career and vocational path. Pope Francis' March 25, 2019 Apostolic Exhortation to Young People, *Christus Vivit*, has a valuable section on how young people discern their work, career and vocational path in the light of their Catholic faith. See 268-273.

Patris Corde! – with a Father’s Heart! The fatherly heart of St. Joseph helps to guide the fatherhood of the Catholic priest. Just as “Jesus learned at the school of Joseph to do the will of the Father,”⁴ so too does the Catholic priest learn and teach from the school of Joseph.

St. Joseph, Craftsman of the Interior Life

So many great saints, such as the Carmelite Mystical Doctor of the Church, St. Teresa of Avila, encourage us to “go to Joseph” for his intercession for progress and depth in our interior lives. This is true for priests, too.

In a certain sense, St. Joseph is an intercessory craftsman of the Catholic priest’s interior life. St. Josemaria Escriva urges us to “Get to know Joseph and you will find Jesus.”⁵ St. Joseph is a craftsman of the Catholic priest’s Mental Prayer, a craftsman of the parish priest’s daily plan of life for prayer, and a craftsman of the parish priest’s use of the evangelizing power of silence. As Catholic priests, we must “go to Joseph” for his intercession and example.

Brothers, there is not one of us here today who does not want our mental prayer to grow, deepen, and expand like the fine wine of Cana, and yet we are so often discouraged and distracted.

Sometimes when we sit down for mental prayer, we find that instead of focusing on the presence of God and God’s Glory, we may find anger, resentment, irritation, preoccupation, even temptation rising in our souls. With St. Teresa of Avila, we accept the fact of our humanity and that “wild horses” so often run through our brains and hearts.

At the same time, we should “go to Joseph” for inspiration. His maturity and reliability, his fortitude, perseverance and “courageous courage,”⁶ his refined sense of justice and the “nobility of his heart,”⁷ and his spirit of being “a respectful and sensitive man”⁸ encourage us in the midst of difficulties.

⁴ Pope Francis’ December 8, 2020 Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*.

⁵ St. Josemaria Escriva, March 19, 1963 homily for the Feast of St. Joseph “In Joseph’s Workshop,” *Christ is Passing By*, (New York: Scepter Publishers, 1973), 121.

⁶ Pope Francis’ December 8, 2020 Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*.

⁷ Pope Francis’ December 8, 2020 Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*.

⁸ Pope Francis’ December 8, 2020 Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*.

St. Joseph persevered despite challenges. He was a craftsman who worked through every problem and every flawed piece of wood. He can help us do likewise with our prayer.

So, let us “go to Joseph” for his intercession in the Holy Spirit’s crafting of our interior life, our missionary life, our preaching, our pastoral charity, presence and creativity, all uniquely and providentially designed according to our personality and temperament, the family we grew up in, the moment of Church and World history in which we live, the gifts and talents we have been given, the Crosses we have carried, are carrying and will carry.

St. Joseph, Patron of a Happy and Holy Death

Catholic priests are a bridge of compassion and preparation between life on earth and the life to come. Through our pastoral presence and charity, through the Sacraments of the Anointing of the Sick and Penance, and through our praying of the Hail Mary “for us sinners now and at the hour of death,” we priests play a vital role in shepherding souls from this world to the Father’s House.

In this important task, may we never forget we have St. Joseph as an intercessor. He who left this world in the presence of Our Lady and Our Lord is close not only to the dying but to us priests who minister to them.

Here is one prayer to St. Joseph that takes up this theme: “O holy St. Joseph, who died in the arms of the Son of God and in the presence of his holy Mother, I beseech you at my last hour to stand by me, with your Immaculate Spouse, that assisted by both your prayers, I may repent of my sins, and breathe my last breath in an act of perfect love and confidence in my Savior, repeating his blessed Name, exalted above every name, and proclaiming joyfully ‘Lord, into your hands, I commend my spirit.’ Amen.”

As Catholic priests, as we minister to the dying with Our Lady, we pray for people at the hour of their death. We pray for their families, friends and loved ones. We do this constantly. Let us never fail to “go to Joseph” to assist us and intercede for those to whom we minister.

Let us also “go to Joseph” to intercede with the Holy Spirit to shape and configure our priesthoods to the wooden contours of the Cross and the preparation for own Happy and Holy Deaths.

For when we are confident and prepared with St. Joseph for a Happy and Holy Death, our faith, confidence, and preparation are communicated so powerfully, so naturally and so beautifully to the people and families we serve who are all, at every age, preparing for death.

Mary, Queen of the Clergy, and St. Joseph, Guardian of Priests, pray for us!