



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

3rd Sunday of Advent Year B

The Anointed

Readings: Isaiah 61: 1-2, 10-1; Lk 1: 46-50, 53-54, John 1: 6-8, 19-28

When I became a Catholic I was Chrismated, anointed with the Oil of Chrism. I did not need to be re-baptised because baptism is accepted. Baptism may be performed by anyone providing it is done properly by the pouring of water in the threefold name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Catholic Church does not accept either Anglican orders or their consecrations as valid. The Church of England had decisively broken communion with the Universal Church and increasingly had no common doctrine of intention or Presence or ministry. The Principal of my seminary believed most things that Catholics do. The bishop who ordained me deacon turned out to be a Freemason. The bishop, under whom I served longest, was a thoroughgoing protestant who told me, belatedly, that he had never believed in priesthood but was appointing 'managers to local branches'. The use of oils was a fairly recent rediscovery in Anglican circles and only used sporadically. No oils were used at my Anglican confirmation or ordination.

Magnify that down the centuries since the break with Rome and you will understand why I was glad to be anointed by oil blessed by the Catholic bishop – who had been ordained by Catholic Bishops in communion with the Universal Church in an unbroken line back to Peter and the Christ Himself. The doctrine of intention, Presence and ministry was utterly consistent.

When I was ordained as a Catholic priest I was anointed, my hands that they might carry out the Apostolic ministry of blessing God's people in the sacramental life.

Anointing is important both as a sign and an expression of the spiritual reality. We follow Christ – the Anointed One. In anointing us (at our baptisms, confirmations, ordinations and in our final hours) the Church is reminding us of our calling to be little Christs, and empowering us with His sacramental grace to be like Him.

Anointing is an ancient tradition. It is why we hear of it in today's reading from the prophet Isaiah. Anointing was applied to two categories of people, Kings and Priests. Those of you old enough to remember will recall that this part of Catholic practice still obtains in the Anglican Coronation Service. The Monarch is anointed.

For Catholic Christians we understand that we follow Christ and that, as His Disciples, we are part of His Kingdom. More than that, we are, as St. Paul puts it, 'ambassadors for Christ'. More than that, we are inheritors of that kingdom. We are, as the great Cornish revivalist preacher, Billy Bray, used to say, part of the royal family of God. 'I am a prince because I

have the King of Kings for my father'. So we are anointed heirs of the kingdom.

And priesthood?

Well there is only one priesthood and that is the great High Priesthood of Christ. Everything else is derived from that. So Jesus Christ has granted us an Apostolic Priesthood, descended sacramentally from the Rock of Peter, a priesthood to strengthen the faithful, serve the Church, maintain the doctrine, the truth of the Gospel, guard the flock and dispense the medicine of immortality in the Mass and the sacramental life of Christ's Church on earth.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. There is also the priesthood of all the faithful – not in contradistinction to the Apostolic priesthood but rather the inevitable outreach of that ministry devolved from Christ Himself. By virtue of sheer numbers, faithfulness and grace, the lay apostolate will reach far more places and people than even the most diligent priest. Wherever the Christened, the Anointed, go they will be, if they are faithful, people who bring 'the fragrance of Christ' with them. They will be honest bearers of the Eternal Word in all they say and do and are. The mystery of redemption that they have received in the Sacraments will overflow in love and mercy to the community in which they live and to which they minister. They will be the incarnation of the Body of Christ for they are The Church. They are the ones who, with their Apostolic Priests, prepare the Way of the Lord into the hearts of men and women. They are the ones who will introduce others to Jesus. If our lives as Christians are attractive then people will be drawn to us. But it must

never stop there. Like the Baptist we need to take the next step and tell them about the One whose shoelace we are not worthy to untie. Jesus. The Christ. The Anointed One. The King of Kings and Great High Priest. That little smudge of oil in the shape of His Cross links us to Him and to the faithful of all the ages now and in eternity. That little smudge of oil is our reminder, our vocation and our rallying call to the Gospel Mission.

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