

CHRISM MASS / April 11, 2022
Homily – Bishop Mark Hagemoen
Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

Isaiah 61:1-3 The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. **Isaiah 61:6** but you shall be called priests of the LORD, you shall be named ministers of our God; **Isaiah 61:8-9** I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

Revelation 1:4-8 ⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. ⁷ Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. ⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Luke 4:16-21 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Dear Brother Bishops and Priests, and all of the People of God of the Diocese of Saskatoon:

We gather again to celebrate another Chrism Mass together as we begin Holy Week, - a day when clergy join to celebrate the priesthood – the priesthood of Jesus Christ – to be renewed in our priestly life.

As I begin, I wish to express my profound thanks to all of you. During this past year I have continued to receive much support from you as we carry out together our priestly ministry in service of the mission of Jesus Christ and his Church for all the People of God. Growth, change, new challenges, opportunities – seems to be a constant. I have been inspired and blessed by you all – and for this I am immensely grateful - to you and to Almighty God. I express this gratitude to all the religious and lay faithful of our Diocese. I continue to be inspired and blessed by the great faith, creativity, trust, and zeal of all of the People of God of this diocese, and inspired by your Christ-like response to these times.

The journey continues!! We continue to experience a time when the lives of people have been so upended. A remarkable issue confronting our world right now is the brutal invasion and war in Ukraine.

I shared recently at a men's gathering, called "Priest, Prophet and King" that we are witnessing and experiencing what only a short while ago would have thought never to be seen again - the unthinkable aggression by a major world power on a European country – Vladimir Putin's Russian invasion of Ukraine. The unthinkable is that the ugliness and atrocities of both world wars less than a century ago is raising its head again. None of us really have any idea what it is like to be moved from the utter conviction that we must go forward and give of ourselves towards a conflict, a war where we sacrifice all our efforts – and our lives. Then, in the midst of something more terrible than we could ever have imagined – we see our fellows, literally having limbs or even their torsos – torn, ripped apart – and seeing such a steady barrage of blood, guts, and human carnage - which no video game or noblest battle version of 'Gladiator' or 'Lord of the Rings' could ever prepare anyone for. Soon young heroic men are moved from their bravura to being heard crying for their mothers – as all around them is death and carnage that makes no sense and is probably one of the worst kinds of hell this side of the eternal one!

I also shared at the same gathering of men the larger polarizations that we have experienced recently. While these trends predate the time of the pandemic, the pandemic has certainly drastically magnified these polarizations. Few experiences have so laid bare the need to apply ALL that our Catholic faith teaches when dealing with a crisis that has resulted in polarizations that have not only affected nations and cultures, but parishes and families! In all of this, the interpretation and evaluation has shifted to not merely being politically polarized, but ‘morally polarized’ as well. A commentary and summary that I am hearing much about – and with which I generally agree – is that we have moved from a basic awareness that sin is within my heart, and I need to work on my moral conversion. We have moved to a place which may be described as ‘the evil that is over there and is away from me’. The line between good and evil no longer runs through every individual but runs between groups. We are seeing even within our faith groups and families that we have absorbed too much of the culture – and in doing so have manifested the culture versus the gospel. We are doing not a very good job of being ‘salt and light.’

The conclusion to the men gathered on this point is that we live in a time of **tension**. On a day in which we celebrate and renew our call to the ordained priesthood and the feature of priestly ‘fatherhood’, I point out that all of the great biblical leaders who reveal qualities of Priestly Fatherhood all faced tension – often profoundly! Such tension called forth the worst and the best from them – most significantly interiorly and also exteriorly.

I was taught many years ago in a dogmatic theology class – on the topic of the problem of faulty images of God – that we always need to hold up all that Sacred Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church says about God. If we bias and isolate one reference over all others – we heighten the chance that our image of God will be partial and, given the problem of human interpretation left to its own devices – even faulty.

So I asked the men gathered, and I ask you here now - how are you doing with living in this time of Tension? What is our guide and path to living through such

tension? Because this will tell us a lot about ourselves – our motivation, our model for priesthood and fatherhood. It was also tell us about what Kingdom we are choosing.

As you know – living in tension is nothing new for the Church. Indeed, it has been with it from the beginning. Back to tonight’s first Reading from the Prophet Isaiah. This famous passage is at a very significant time of Israel’s history. The people have returned from the utter disaster of the Babylonian exile, and are rebuilding their land, their community, and their Temple. At the time of ‘Third Isaiah’ – the section that is our 1st Reading – the second exodus back to Judah has taken place, but the experience has been far from glorious. In fact, life for the returnees in Judah remained very harsh: there was economic oppression, and a resurgence of pagan rituals as people attempt to cope with life’s problems.

The prophet directs to ‘not loosing faith and trusting in God’s vision and promise.’ He exhorts the people to ‘stay the course’ of living righteous and good lives – and states that God’s joy and prosperity will come, as will Zion’s deliverance and glorification. The great pronouncement of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel recalls this time of return from slavery and bondage, and facing God’s promise of new hope for a people continually tempted over the ages to lose hope in a world of disappointment, abuse, and unfulfilled expectations.

Our 2nd Reading today – the passage from Revelation – reminds us of a time when the early church was in profound tension and crisis. To a persecuted People of God – St John inspires and challenges the early church about where they set their vision. If it is on the tension and crisis itself – they will succumb. But if on “He who is coming with the clouds – the one is pierced – the Alpha and the Omega – then His grace and peace is with us – and the way of love and freedom from our sins because of His blood and sacrifice – will be with us. (see Rev. 1:4-8)

Our Catholic teaching is that the Kingdom of God is fully manifest in Jesus Christ. And, although His Kingdom will be fully manifest in the next life – His Kingdom is present in Him in the here and now!! We recall that Jesus Himself lived in a time of many tensions – social, political, economic, and religious. How does His life guide us through all of this ...ALL of His life and teachings.

As you know, the scriptures for our Chrism Mass are the same ones we use each year. Yet, as I reflect on the Prophet Isaiah in our 1st reading, – oh how they speak to me profoundly at this time.

“The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news ...to the oppressed ...the broken-hearted ...to the captives and prisoners ...to those who mourn... **to give them**

... a garland instead of ashes

... the oil of gladness instead of mourning

... the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit” (Is 61:2-3)

What may seem like unrelatable metaphors of contradiction have inspired the various disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout the ages. One of these is the famous Thomas a Kempis, whose reflections have inspired many disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ – both the novice and the master - about the radical way of the Gospel.

I wish to briefly reflect on a section that I recently reviewed on encountering God’s love and interior conversion. Thomas says the following about ‘love’ as a feature of the Imitation of Christ.

Love is a strong force – a great good in every way; ...It carries a burden and does not feel it; it makes all that is bitter taste sweet. The noble love of Jesus urges us to do great things and spurs us on to desire perfection. Love tends upward to God and is not occupied with the things of earth.... So that its inner vision does not become dimmed, nor does it let itself be trapped by a temporal interest or downcast by misfortune.” (Thomas a Kempis:)

I think what is notable here for busy priests doing so much work in the vineyard of the parish and diocese – and many other places that are features of our priesthood – is that it can be so easy to succumb to the worries and pre-occupations of ministry, administration, and regular demands featuring our call to service and duty. In this environment, it is easy for us to take on the ethos and culture of our time – which can have the effect of dimming our vision, and leaving us preoccupied with the affairs of our times that can overwhelm. Of course, this is why a regular and rigorous prayer life is so important. Unless we are regularly receiving from God – we can become virtually stuck in a world that seems to get more mired than freed.

But our priesthood is potent when it manifests the Sacrament of the present moment – Jesus is *in our midst*. He is *Immanuel* – our God comes to bless, comfort, guide, save His peoplein us and through us!!

But let us remember that it is Jesus Christ who lives and acts in us that is what – is Who - makes our priesthood efficacious. Otherwise – the Theo-drama may become the Ego-drama – if you know what I mean!! To this point, Thomas a Kempis also has a description and council about the qualities and features of God’s love – a love in its totality and amazing complexity just seems utterly out of reach for us. But it comes to us in Christ Jesus! And this love can take hold of us and be manifest in us through our intimate life with God – an essential feature of the priesthood. Thus, - we cannot be good pastors, ministers, and ‘fathers’ of our people, if we are not *mystics* – ones who have an intimate, mysterious, and personal relationship with God. As Thomas a Kempis states:

Love is ever watchful; it rests, but does not sleep; though weary, it is not tired; restricted, yet not hindered. Although it sees reason to fear, it is not dismayed; but like a spark of fire or a burning flame, it blazes upward to God by the fervor of its love, and through the help of His grace is delivered from all dangers.

...Love is swift, sincere, pious, joyful and glad; it is strong, patient, faithful, wise, forbearing, courageous, and is never self-seeking; for when people seek themselves, they cease to love. Love is cautious, humble and upright; not weak, not flighty, nor concerned with trifles. It is sober, chaste, firm, quiet, and keeps guard over the senses. Love is submissive and obedient to authority, mean and despicable in its own sight, devout and thankful to God. Love always trust and hopes in God, even when it lacks fervor; for there is no living in love without some sorrow or pain.

This kind of love cannot be merely learned from the best dogmatic text-books, nor can it be found through endless active service. It is a gift and a wisdom that can in its fullness only come from the Source.

And so, brothers – one more theme that I shared recently at the men’s ‘Priest, Prophet, and King’ event that I think has profound impact on our lives as His Priests – **let us reflect on Our Model of FATHERHOOD – And we had better make room for the MYSTIC!**

Thus, the Mystic! The life of the Mystic helps us to encounter God so that as we deal with all sorts of challenges and difficult issues, and of course the opportunities and privileges of priestly fatherhood – we will not be consumed but rather become more and more the brilliant, beautiful healthy men of God that we are called and destined to be.

This is a lesson of the 2nd Sunday of Lent – in the first Reading from Exodus - Moses meets God in the burning bush that is not consumed by the fire, but rather is made more lively and luminescent because of the presence of God. Or, a lesson we behold in the life of St. Joseph, who could have been utterly devastated and overwhelmed by fear at the threat to his family. He can receive and respond to God's message brought to him in dreams – which represent his own mystical union with God in his life and vocation of fatherhood.

Speaking about Moses - I share with you the following quote by Pope Francis several years ago, who reflected on the life of Moses. As I share this, hear the qualities not only of the leader of Israel bravely showing the enslaved Israelites the pathway to freedom – despite their constant resistance, fear, and rebellion – but also hear the important and distinguishing features of fatherhood:

The great leaders of the people of God were men that left room for doubt. Going back to Moses, he is the most humble character that there was on Earth. Before God, no one else remained more humble, and he that wants to be a leader of the people of God has to give God His space; therefore to shrink, to recede into oneself with doubt, with the interior experiences of darkness, of not knowing what to do, all that ultimately is very purifying. The bad leader is the one who is self-assured and stubborn. One of the characteristics of a bad leader is to be excessively normative because of his self-assurance.

A feature about the biblical account of Moses that has struck me is what God did through Moses, and what God did not. What He did not do – was force the rebellious wills and hearts of the Israelites to submission. What He did do was do great things to reveal Who He was, and His plan to save Israel. **And He did this through Moses.**

I think I have shared with some of you before one of my favorite quotes from the papal household preacher, now Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Capuchin, who a number of years ago reflected on the late Fr. Karl Rahner's statement about the mystic,

as follows: “The devout Christian of the future will either be a ‘mystic’, one who has ‘experienced’ something, or he will cease to be anything at all.” Then Fr. Cantalamessa reflected as follows: “In order to keep faith alive in the future, we will need the witness of those who have had a profound experience of God, rather than people who can demonstrate its rational plausibility.”

I begin these comments by saying that the devout man of God needs to experience the fatherhood of God. And since all of us – no matter what vocation – are called to participate in the fatherhood of God – which means we represent His Fatherhood to our families, our parishes, and larger communities – then we better have a profound and regular experience of the fatherhood of God – because merely describing and demonstrating it is not enough!

You all know that we have begun an undergraduate formation house for men considering priesthood or religious life, called St. Benedict and Scholastica. The Verbum Dei Sisters – along with several of our own priests and laity with related training and experience – oversee a human and spiritual formation program for the candidates, that is now required by the Vatican for all men preparing for the priesthood. One of the key sections is entitled – ‘family of origin’ in which the candidates reflect on various experience of roles of fatherhood. As they work through the book by David Stoop titled, “Making Peace with your Father”, they reflect on various topics about the qualities of fatherhood, and more difficult topics regarding the following:

1. Ways and times when our Father let us down or eluded us:

- The workaholic father
- The silent father
- The emotionless father
- The alcoholic father
- The tyrannical father
- The abusive father
- The seductive father
- The competitive father
- The idealizer father
- The good-enough father

2. The author summarizes DANGEROUS FATHERS:

- The physically abusive father

- The molesting father
- The terrorizing father
- The weak father

3. And, the author outlines The HEALING PROCESS

- Identify the Symptoms
- The Process of Forgiveness
- God our Healing Father

As I reviewed this list, I not only thought of my own experience of my father and fatherhood generally which came also from my grandfathers and uncles – I also began to think of what example of fatherhood I have revealed over the years as a priest and as a bishop. I would have to say that I had a lot to learn, and that I made many mistakes – some of which are represented in the list I just went through – in my own experience of providing leadership and fatherhood.

That’s why the point about making room for the Mystic! Why the Mystic? The mystic is a person who has a regular and direct experience of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This encounter features a deepening intimacy with the Lord and goes beyond merely studying about God and the things of God. It also involves experiencing the mind and heart of God, which also features largely in what the Church calls ‘ongoing conversion of life and heart’ as we become the image of the Sacred Heart Himself.”

Thus, the Mystic! The life of the Mystic helps us to be so open and ‘poor’ before God that we encounter Him – of course so that as we deal with all sorts of challenges and difficult issues, and the opportunities and privileges of fatherhood – we will not be consumed but rather become more and more the brilliant, beautiful healthy men of God that we are called and destined to be. Ironically, the poorer we are, the less susceptible we are to being consumed by the affairs and worries of the world.

Thus, I conclude my comments with a reflection on the importance for our Priesthood of being **Poor in Spirit**: the First Beatitude. I share a few quotes from Fr. Jacques Philippe in his book, “Priestly Fatherhood: Treasure in Earthen Vessels” in the section on the First Beatitude: “Blessed are the Poor in Spirit for Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” 2 points.

Firstly on the journey for Priests of becoming ‘poor’.

When we become fathers, when children are entrusted to us, we become poor. We can no longer live for ourselves but must live for another. It is no longer our own interests that are the most important things, but those of the child. We are no longer autonomous; we become a dependent of those who depend on us. The man who becomes a father must submit to this new, fragile life that has been put in his hands. It is in this little one who becomes the master! It is often the little ones, with their needs, who decide the daily program of life. It's the same with spiritual fatherhood. "The poor are our masters," Vincent de Paul used to say.

...human fatherhood always directs us to something bigger than ourselves. It points to something transcendent. What fundamental and universal human truths am I going to communicate to the child? Toward what vital meanings will I orient his or her growth? What God will I propose that they adore? Worldly idols or the true and living God?

What does it mean to be poor? It means not being able to rely in the end on anything but God; having no other security than our faith and our hope in the Lord; the impossibility of relying on ourselves, our capacities, our conceptions, our wisdom, our formation, and counting on God alone. The Cure of Ars said, 'God gave me the great mercy of not putting anything in me that I can rely on: no talent, no knowledge, no wisdom, no strength, no virtue.'

This doesn't mean that the realities that I just mentioned (capacities, formation, competencies, acquired wisdom) are useless or disdainful things. Not at all; it is right to acquire them. We must make use of them - but not create a safety net of them. We must use them but always in a way that, in the end, we rely on God alone and on His mercy, which really support us.

Secondly, on SPIRITUAL POVERTY & HUMILITY

We must consent to a complete dependence on God's grace. This is the way we can receive grace most abundantly. There is nothing like humility for attracting the grace of the Holy Spirit. 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble,' St. Peter said (1 Pt 5:5). We should not attribute to ourselves the good that we accomplish, or use it to inflate our ego, claiming a victory for us. Instead we should attribute it, with thanksgiving, to God, who is the only source of good.

... The more a person has poverty of spirit, being gentle and humble, the more his words take on a true authority, a capacity to convince. It's paradoxical, but experience shows that it's true. What gives authority to our words is not being louder than others, or having more subtle or intelligent arguments, nor does it rely on our number of diplomas or the vast culture we exhibit. What does give it

authority is when in those words, there is not self-seeking, when they are totally dis-interested, when they are never in service of our own interests but are only in the service of the truth.

I take this opportunity to note the great humility in service of truth shown to us and all the world in the recent apology by Pope Francis to the Indigenous delegations to Rome just over a week ago!

CONCLUSION: And so Brothers, Happy and Blessed birthday to you all. On this day we are reminded that we have the remarkable privilege ...and duty... to make real and present to the world the powerful, healing, life-giving presence of the Saviour who has walked with us, has suffered and died, and now is risen. He calls us beyond our incompleteness and pain, to a new promise and reality. Indeed, new HOPE for the World!

If we are to do this and live this as priests, so we need to meet the Saviour of our own lives, who proposes to us the alternate and single way – between any extreme that seems to provide temporary answers and security – to the way of Life and Abundance that changes and saves the world.

We proclaim we renewed vigour and conviction: *We adore You O Christ and we praise You, for by Your holy cross you have saved and redeemed the world.*