

Claiming our Baptism

2021 Orlando Liturgical Conference

Thank you for the warm invitation to return to the Diocese of Orlando for your liturgical conference. You welcomed me in 1996 for a Beginnings and Beyond Institute with the North American Forum on the Catechumenate, in 2009 for a workshop about the reception of validly baptized Christians into the full communion of the Catholic Church, then in 2011 for this conference to speak about the revised translation of the Roman Missal, and again in 2013 for both a closer and a broader view of the missal and the Mass. I returned in 2014 for the North American Academy of Liturgy meeting. So, hello again to friends I've made before, and nice to meet you for those I'm encountering for the first time.

The theme for your conference this year is “Liturgy in Action: Claiming our Baptism.” I've been asked to deliver two talks this morning and participate in a panel after lunch. The conference theme came from a wish to recommit ourselves to some liturgical basics as we crawl out from under the blanket of what we hope is the worst of the pandemic. I will treat the two halves of this theme in reverse order: first, claiming our baptism, and then, liturgy in action. With this talk, I'd like to meditate with you on the meaning of one of the prayers in the Order of Baptism of Children that refers to the ministry of Christ who is priest, prophet and king. As this prayer makes clear, we all share in these ministries from the day we are baptized. In the second talk I will speak about the implications of those ministries for the fruitful celebration of the Mass. I hope to help affirm you in the great gift of your baptism and to encourage you to participate wholeheartedly in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Let's start with baptism. Here is what the priest or deacon says when he anoints a newly baptized child with the oil we call sacred chrism: “Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has freed you from sin, given you new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and joined you to his people. He now anoints you with the Chrism of salvation, so that you may remain members of Christ, Priest, Prophet and King, unto eternal life.”

Chrism is traditionally mixed from olive oil and balsam, though the Vatican now permits us to use any vegetable oil and any perfume. Only a bishop may make chrism. Under certain conditions any priest may bless the oil of catechumens or the oil of the sick for a single use within the rites of infant baptism or anointing of the sick, but he cannot consecrate chrism. We use chrism for sacraments that are celebrated only once: baptism, confirmation and ordination to the priesthood. At baptism, the minister anoints the crown of the head; at confirmation he anoints the forehead; at ordination to the priesthood, the bishop anoints the hands of the new priest; and at the ordination of a new bishop, the presiding bishop pours chrism over the new bishop's head. The spiritual

properties of chrism seep through the skin and stay with the believer forever. The bishop also uses chrism to anoint a new altar for the celebration of the Mass, and priests may assist him when he uses chrism to anoint the walls of a new church. Similarly these objects are forever anointed.

We use oil at the baptism of a child to perform explicitly an action the New Testament describes symbolically. In Acts of the Apostles, when St. Peter catechized the household of Cornelius, he explained that “beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, ...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy Spirit and power” (10:38). As Christ was anointed, so are Christians, once and for all, at baptism: he with the Holy Spirit, we with sacred chrism.

The beautiful declaration that accompanies this anointing happens only at the baptism of an infant, so some who were baptized as adults may lament that it was never said over them. When a priest baptizes adults, he confirms them with chrism; to avoid confusion over the two uses of the same oil, the Church asks us to omit the first anointing with chrism, and to bestow the more important one, confirmation. Sometimes under emergency situations, a person is baptized with water, when no chrism is available, nor the proper minister to use it. Still, even on occasions without these words, baptism makes us members of the people of God.

The present formula enriches the one that the priest recited before the reforms from the Second Vatican Council. Here’s what he used to say, though he proclaimed the text in Latin: “Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has given you new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and has given you forgiveness of all your sins. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation in the same Christ Jesus our Lord unto eternal life.” You see the differences. The new formula puts the forgiveness of sins ahead of the new birth, and adds several important themes: This child is joined to “his people,” which would be more clearly rendered as “the people of God.” The Second Vatican Council favored that expression to show how the Church is not just the hierarchy but all the people. Furthermore, the previous formula anointed with chrism “in the same Christ,” but the revised formula says that the infants will forever remain “members of Christ, Priest, Prophet and King.” We’ll see how this lays the foundation for the full, conscious, active participation of the people in the Eucharist, putting liturgy into action. So, when we speak at this conference about claiming our baptism, this is a good place to begin.

Those three titles—priest, prophet and king—recall significant individuals in the Old Testament who all received an anointing. In the Book of Exodus the Lord told Moses to anoint Aaron and his sons, consecrating them as priests (30:30). In the First Book of Kings the Lord commanded the prophet Elijah to anoint his successor Elisha (19:16), and the prophet Isaiah said the Lord anointed him to bring good news to the afflicted (61:1). The Lord anointed Saul as king when Samuel poured oil over Saul’s head (1 Sam 10:1). Samuel later anointed David (1 Sam 16:13, Ps 89:21), and Zadok anointed Solomon as king (1 Kings 1:39). Jesus perfects all these roles: He is priest, prophet and king supreme. As Jesus received a metaphorical anointing in his baptism, we receive a physical

anointing in ours. Through our baptism and especially with the anointing of chrism we become members of Christ under these titles.

What does it mean to be a member of Christ? The Second Vatican Council explored these themes in one of its key documents, *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, promulgated by Pope Saint Paul VI in 1964. It explains all three of these titles, beginning with priesthood. The council distinguished between the ministerial priest and the priestly people. “The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity” (10). The ministerial priest acts in the name of the people, but the people of God all perform priestly actions in sacraments, prayer, witness, self-denial and charity.

Later, *Lumen Gentium* further develops this theme: “[Christ] also gives [the laity] a sharing in His priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of [humans].... [All] their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (1 Peter 2:5). Together with the offering of the Lord's body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist” (34). We’ll revisit that passage from the First Letter of Peter shortly. Notice the additional ways that every baptized layperson is a priest in everyday life. Priests pray. Priests offer sacrifice. Everyone who is baptized and anointed as a member of Christ who is priest shares this ministry.

St. Óscar Romero made a similar point in a much-cited quote from the collection of his works called *The Violence of Love*. It juxtaposes well with the concept of the priesthood of the faithful from *Lumen Gentium*. St. Óscar broadcast many of his Masses and homilies on local radio in El Salvador. Imagine listening to this on the radio as you went about your daily work, whether at home, at the office, at school or in the car: “How beautiful will be the day when all the baptized understand that their work, their job, is a priestly work; that just as I celebrate Mass at this altar, so each carpenter celebrates Mass at his workbench, and each metalworker, each professional, each doctor with a scalpel, the market woman at her stand, is performing priestly office! How many cabdrivers, I know, listen to this message there in their cabs; you are a priest at the wheel, my friend, if you work with honesty, consecrating that taxi of yours to God, bearing a message of peace and love to the passengers who ride in your cab.” Each Catholic in the Diocese of Orlando can easily apply this to your life: You act like priests because you share in the priesthood of Christ.

Lumen Gentium also speaks about prophets. In contemporary English we use the word “prophet” for someone who foretells the future. In the bible, much as priests are messengers of the people’s word to God, the prophets are

messengers of God's word to the people. The priest prays about the people's concerns; the prophet informs them about God's concerns. In *Lumen Gentium* the church speaks of prophets as people who live in charity, share a strong belief, and use the gifts of the Spirit for the sake of others. Here's a direct quote:

“The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise. The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief.... [The Holy Spirit] distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church” (12).

Then, a little later, *Lumen Gentium* describes the ministry of Christ in ways that recall the Old Testament prophets who spoke God's word: **“Christ, the great Prophet, who proclaimed the Kingdom of His Father both by the testimony of His life and the power of His words, continually fulfills His prophetic office until the complete manifestation of glory. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity whom He made His witnesses and to whom He gave understanding of the faith (*sensus fidei*) and an attractiveness in speech (Acts 2:17-18; Revelation 19:10) so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life” (35).**

As the biblical prophets brought God's word to the world, so do we. This prophetic **“understanding of the faith,”** the *sensus fidei*, comes not just from the hierarchy, but from the laity of the church. The first of the two biblical allusions in this paragraph comes from Acts of the Apostles, but it cites the prophesy of Joel: **“Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. Indeed, upon my servants and my handmaids I will pour out a portion of my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy.”** The second biblical allusion is to the testimony of the angel to John: **“Witness to Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”** Both the Old and the New Testaments testify how ordinary people partake in the ministry of prophets.

Lumen Gentium also speaks about sharing in the ministry of Christ the King. **“All... are called to belong to the new people of God.... God sent His Son... that he might be teacher, king and priest of all, the head of the new and universal people of the [children] of God. For this too God sent the Spirit of His Son as Lord and Life-giver. He it is who brings together the whole Church and each and every one of those who believe” (13).** We are the people of God, and Christ is our King. We gladly make ourselves subject to his rule of law.

Later, *Lumen Gentium* continues this theme: **“Christ, becoming obedient even unto death and because of this exalted by the Father, entered into the glory of His kingdom. To Him all things are made subject until He subjects Himself and all created things to the Father that God may be all in all. Now Christ has communicated this royal power to His disciples that they might be constituted in royal freedom and that by true penance and a holy life they might conquer the reign of sin in themselves. Further, He has shared this power so that serving**

Christ in [others] they might by humility and patience lead their [brothers and sisters] to that King for whom to serve is to reign” (36).

As king, Christ rules over us, yet he serves us, and shares his royal power with us. The first attribute of Christ in which we share is power—power that makes us free. We use this power primarily over another kingdom that imprisons us, the reign of sin. We overcome it by penance and a holy way of life. We refrain from sin because Christ the King shares with us his authority over the forces of evil. Christ used his power to serve, and he expects us to use power in serving others with humility and patience. To serve is to reign.

This insight concludes the refrain of the beautiful hymn, *Pan de vida* by Bob Hurd and Pia Moriarty. Many of you know the lyric: “*Pan de vida, cuerpo del señor, cup of blessing, blood of Christ the Lord, at his table the last shall be first, poder es servir porque Dios es amor.*” “To reign is to serve because God is love.”

Of all these images, priest, prophet and king, the combination that resonates strongly through the post-Vatican II Church is royal priesthood. Christian Initiation: General Introduction appears in the front of both the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and the Order of Baptism of Children. It lists this among the many descriptions of Baptism: “Baptism is the Sacrament by which human beings are incorporated into the Church and are built up together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit, and into a royal priesthood and a holy nation; it is also a sacramental bond of unity linking all who are signed by it” (4). “Royal priesthood” indicates a people of privilege and responsibility. We are baptized as children of God, and we share in the ministry of Christ.

The concept is based on the First Letter of Peter chapter 2, verses 5 and 9. We saw a reference to this in the comments from *Lumen Gentium* about priesthood. In these verses, Peter writes, “Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” And, “[You are] ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises’ of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” Notice the quotation marks within the quotation marks. The First Letter of Peter is referencing other passages from the bible.

God told Moses, “You will be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. That is what you must tell the Israelites” (Exod 19:6). God spoke through the prophet Isaiah, “You yourselves shall be called ‘Priests of the LORD,’ ‘Ministers of our God’ you shall be called. You shall eat the wealth of the nations and in their riches you will boast” (61:6). Then in the New Testament Book of Revelation we read, “[To Christ] who has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever [and ever]. Amen” (1:6). And “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over these; they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for [the] thousand years” (20:6). God chose a people to be a holy nation, which he defined as an entire kingdom of priests. We in the new covenant are likewise given that title: All the baptized are an entire kingdom of priests.

These verses from the First Letter of Peter became a touchstone for Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Here is one way it described the motivation behind the liturgical renewal: "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the nature of the liturgy itself, and to which the Christian people, 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people' (1 Peter 2:9; cf. 4-5) have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism" (14). You, the priestly people, have an obligation to participate at Mass, not because of some canon law, but because of who you are. You also have the right to participate fully, consciously and actively at Mass because of who you are.

The Constitution on the Liturgy also said, "every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree" (7). Baptism gives us the privilege to participate in this surpassing experience.

The Constitution went on to say that going to Mass demands more than showing up: "The Church... desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; ... they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves" (SC 48). We are a priestly people performing priestly actions.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal borrows these themes. The Instruction is the prologue to the missal that details the rules for celebrating Mass and the use of the missal. You will recognize now how it took ideas directly from the Second Vatican Council. For example, it says, "In the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people of God's own possession and a royal Priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the unblemished sacrificial Victim not only by means of the hands of the Priest but also together with him and so that they may learn to offer their very selves" (GIRM 95). You hear the echoes of the First Letter of Peter.

Some of this would have surprised people in the late 1960s. They were used to praying quietly in the pews as the priest offered the Mass in the sanctuary. However, based on the themes we have been exploring, the missal now says that especially at the eucharistic prayer, "the whole congregation of the faithful joins with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of Sacrifice" (GIRM 78).

Some of this would have surprised the priests too. The missal asks the priest to call upon the people "to lift up their hearts towards the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving; he associates the people with himself in the Prayer that he

addresses in the name of the entire community to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit” (GIRM 78).

So in Eucharistic Prayer III, you hear the priest say, “make of us an eternal offering to you.” The priestly people offer among the gifts the sacrifice of themselves. In the second Eucharistic Prayer for Masses of Reconciliation, the priests prays, “accept us also, together with your Son.” It makes the same point. We are a royal priesthood, claiming our baptism, and putting the liturgy into action.

Now, I’ve been quoting a lot of documents to you, so let’s pause to reflect a bit of what we’ve seen. I conclude this first talk with a series of questions for your meditation:

What do you know about your own baptism? Who baptized you? Where did it take place? When was it? How long was it after you were born? Why did it take that length of time? Who was there? What physical reminders of your baptism do you have at home? Have you ever commemorated the anniversary of your baptism? How did you do it?

Next, what does it mean to share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ? What is his priesthood anyway? How do you experience Christ the priest in your life? When you think of the crucifixion, how does it depict Christ as a priest? If Christ as priest intercedes on your behalf to the Father, what is he telling the Father about you? What about you needs the prayer of Christ the priest? How are you priestly? Who rises to the top of your prayer list? How do you pray for them? What other intentions form part of your regular prayer? What is your altar? Where do you sacrifice yourself for the sake of others? What motivates you to do that?

What does it mean to share in the prophetic ministry of Jesus Christ? Just thinking over the past few days, for example, when did you speak your mind to someone who disagreed with your values? How does your life of charity reveal to others the message of the gospel? What are the specific gifts that the Holy Spirit has given you? How do you use them? Which prophets are your role models— from the Old Testament and from contemporary culture? Who are the people who seem in touch with God’s Word and speak it to you?

What does it mean to share in the royal ministry of Jesus Christ? How have you exercised power over the forces of evil? What bad habits from your earlier life have you overcome because you rule with Christ the King? How have humility and patience helped you win others to the kingdom of Christ? If someone were to analyze the exercise of your authority, would they call it “power” or “service”?

The title of this talk is “Claiming our Baptism.” As the Second Vatican Council pointed out, baptism conveys on you the rights to participate in the eucharist. Baptism also gives you the rights to share in the ministry of Christ, who is Priest, Prophet and King. Name it. And claim it.