



## ***Chrism Mass 2021***

### ***Sermon by the Right Reverend John R Stephens***

#### ***Livestreamed from Christ Church Cathedral, March 30, 2021***

About a month ago it was reported<sup>1</sup> that the remains of a 2500 year-old olive oil mill was discovered in southern Italy. 2500 years old. It is believed to be the oldest in the area and reveals how important olive oil was in that region and all around the Mediterranean. The consumption of olive oil was seen as part of a healthy diet and many claims were made as to its health benefits and healing properties. Olive oil continues to be recognized as an aid in helping to heal wounds and reduce infection. I am no expert in the health benefits of olive oil but all of this intrigued me.

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<sup>1</sup> Article in the *oliveoiltimes.com* in February 2021

You know how it is with things on the internet, once you start you can't stop and so I kept looking at other things related to olive oil. I discovered that it is a 13 billion-dollar industry world-wide. There are olive oil tastings that take place all over the planet that point out the difference in taste of the oil depending on region, production and soil. Words such as buttery, fruity, peppery and woody are all terms used to describe the oil and lead to how best to pair food and drink. I am sure that you knew all about all of this but I was really quite fascinated by it.

So what has any of this got to do with us as we have gathered, mostly online on this Tuesday of Holy Week and for this Chrism Mass? Well an awful lot really, for it is fully linked to the purpose of the entire diocese gathering on this day and during this week. So let's think about this a little bit.

Yesterday the gospel passage linked to the Monday of Holy Week described the scene where Jesus came to the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. If you remember, Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard and anointed Jesus' feet and then wiped them off with her hair. We were told that the entire house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. Without going into a full analysis of that scene and its significance, perhaps we can just dwell on this anointing and preparing Jesus for something much more, perhaps more than Mary or any of the other disciples might have realized. Perhaps for death, perhaps for healing, perhaps for reigning in the kingdom or realm of heaven, perhaps for the life to come. All of these and I believe much more are wrapped up in that anointing... and this is important as we sit in our pilgrimage through Holy Week.

And in the gospel passage read for today, a passage from the same chapter of John's gospel as the story of Mary anointing Jesus, we hear of some people from Greece who were worshipping at the festival and said, "We wish to see Jesus." While this may seem to be a simple request, it is a request that has echoed through time ever since as we all crave to have a greater glimpse, a greater perspective, a greater sense of the presence and guidance of Jesus in our lives. We wish to see Jesus.

And all of this brings us to this time of worship here and now. For while it is important to gather during Holy Week and meditate upon walking this way with Christ, we are also blessing holy oils, holy olive oil, to be used throughout the diocese at significantly important and transitional events in all of our lives. At Baptisms, Prayers of Healing and preparing for Baptism and Confirmation. They will also be used at Ordination.

These oils have had local herbs and plants added to them to link them more clearly to their purpose but also to this land. With the guidance of Indigenous elders, these oils have been infused with plants that are essential to this region and to the Indigenous people here. The oil on its own is seen as a way of healing and anointing but this has been carried forward to this place and this time and linked to our prayers and our hope in God. The refrain of, "we wish to see Jesus" is linked to these holy oils and our actions in how they will be used and offered for anointing and healing.

At Baptism, the holy oil of chrism is used as part of anointing the one being baptized with these words prayed over them: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." The trinitarian words link the newly baptized with all the Communion of Saints who have gone on before. The holy oil of chrism reminds and invites the richness of the gifts of

the Holy Spirit, leading into ministry and purpose as Christians. It is a sign, if you will, of offering to the newly baptized that it is hoped of them in their lives, prayers, and walk in this world that others might see Jesus working in and through them.

At times of illness, and throughout the Bible there are instances where the holy oil of anointing the sick is offered to the one suffering from illness and disease. The holy oil of unction is seen as a sign of a prayer for healing, a sign of the Holy Spirit being present, a sign of hope, a sign of grace, a sign of love and forgiveness, a sign that God walks with us no matter where our journey takes us. A sign that we might once more see Jesus present and near.

The oil for catechumens is used to mark the beginning of preparation for Baptism and Confirmation. A sign of blessing and reminder of God present within this time of growth and renewal, a time of recognizing God walking with another. A sign that we are called toward Baptism and Confirmation. A sign that we might see Jesus in this process.

Holy oil is also used at Ordination. Once more a sign of the prayers for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Usually the hands and sometimes the head as well of the ordinand that in them once more, Jesus may be seen in the work of their hands, their thoughts, in their actions, their preaching, their prayers, their trust in God, their hope in the Holy Spirit. That they are being set aside to be leaders in the Church of God, that they may know that they are anointed for ministry. That it may be seen that their actions reveal much about the guidance and peace of Christ.

All of these oils, as we bless them on this day are signs of prayers of anointing and healing, reminders of the presence of the Holy Trinity of God at all times in our lives but in

particular those transitional and transformational times. Times where we too might utter the words that we wish to see Jesus.

At this time in Holy Week, as we consider all of this in relation to our own Baptism, it is also important for deacons and priests and bishops to be reminded of their calling and their ministry in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

For at the ordination of a deacon we hear these words prayed: give to this your servant grace and power to fulfil their ministry. Make them faithful to serve, ready to teach, and constant to advance your gospel; and grant that always having full assurance of faith, abounding in hope, and being rooted and grounded in love, they may continue strong and steadfast in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

And at the ordination of a presbyter: give to this your servant grace and power to fulfil their ministry among the people committed to their charge; to watch over them and care for them; to absolve and bless them in your name; and to proclaim the gospel of your salvation. Set them among your people to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable in your sight, and as you have called them to your service, make them by the gift of your Holy Spirit worthy of their calling. Give them wisdom and discipline to work faithfully with all their fellow servants in Christ, that the world may come to know your glory and your love.

Olive oil has been prepared, with local plant extracts offered by Indigenous elders to help us link our baptism, our prayers for healing, our preparation for Baptism and Confirmation and the ordination of individuals with God's hope for this world and our lives. That indeed, the words, "We wish to see Jesus" might be known in our actions. That as we continue to journey

toward Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter we may know more deeply Christ's calling to each of us of new life and new grace as seen in the empty tomb.