

HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
CHRISM MASS
BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHEDRAL
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My brother Bishops and Priests, Deacons and Religious, and my Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

As a way of reflecting on what we celebrate in this, our annual Chrism Mass, and in the ceremonies of the Triduum, I would like to propose one word which summarizes theologically the profound mysteries we are experiencing: the word is *solidarity*. In this liturgy, and all our Holy Week services, we proclaim Christ's free decision to share fully every aspect of our human condition – even to the point of physical and psychological suffering, death and burial. As the Letter to the Hebrews and the fourth Eucharistic prayer remind us, “*Christ was like us in all things but sin.*” He became one with us, that we might enjoy solidarity with God and one another.

Christ's profound humility and gracious service brought about our salvation; He restored our communion with the Father and made possible a new solidarity with one another. As Adam's disobedience had separated us from God and isolated us from one another, Christ's obedience inaugurated a whole new covenant of

solidarity. By His absolute openness to the Father, Christ has shown us how to turn from the isolation of sin to the joy of communion with and for others.

This liturgy and the hours ahead proclaim our solidarity in Christ: the oils that we bless and consecrate will conform us more and more to the likeness of Christ whose humble service has made us one. Marked with these oils, our names, identities, and personalities will be changed. We will be able to say anew with St. Paul, *“It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.”*

Receiving the Oil of the Sick, those struggling with the isolation of physical and psychological illness will experience the gentle touch of Christ through the Church. Being marked with the Oil of the Catechumens assures new members of the Church of the dignity of their place within Christ’s Body. Finally, the Sacred Chrism will consecrate the newly baptized, confirmed, or ordained for the work of solidarity.

Immediately after this homily, we will witness the solidarity of our priests publicly renewing their commitment of service to the Lord and His Church. You will acknowledge their promise, pledging to work together with us for the well-being of the Church.

The ceremonies and rituals of the Triduum also proclaim and manifest our solidarity in Christ. Tonight, as feet are washed, we will publicly recognize how each of us needs to be cleansed and saved by a deeper immersion into Christ’s

loving mercy. And as Christ feeds us with His Body and Blood, we will be challenged to live the bond of unity of what we celebrate and share. Venerating the crucified Christ tomorrow afternoon, at one and the same moment, we will confess the division and pain our sins have caused, but also how Christ's love has transformed them into the solidarity of grace. At the foot of the cross, with the mother of our Lord and the beloved disciple, we will discover anew our unity in Christ. Finally, at the Easter Vigil and on Easter morning, with one voice, in union with the Church throughout the world and throughout the ages, we will proclaim one faith, one Lord, and one Baptism.

Perhaps a story can help illustrate the solidarity we share and celebrate these days and hours. About two months ago, a man who has been very involved in the life of our local Church, was at the brink of dying from cystic fibrosis. His only hope was a double lung transplant. By God's providence, someone from Tennessee died and the transplant operation was successful. He continues to recover, and even though he still has some pain, nonetheless, the whole process has been inspiring. No longer on oxygen, he now breathes on his own with lungs that once belonged to another human being. It took the generosity, talent, and ingenuity of countless individuals to make this miracle happen. A supportive family, skilled technicians, and therapists remain a vital part of the healing process which is allowing him to literally have a "second breath," a new springtime, a new life.

The solidarity of our faith is much the same. Because of our sins, we lose our ability to breathe deeply the things of the Spirit. But through His Paschal Mystery, Christ breathes new life into us, allowing us to speak and act in solidarity with Him – for our own salvation and also for that of the whole world. We breathe in oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide; we breathe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and then exhale them in works of praise and service.

The Scriptures for this Chrism Mass clearly articulate the fact that Jesus defined His mission as one of solidarity, especially with the poor and prisoners, the blind, and all who were oppressed. He understood that the Spirit which rested upon Him and breathed through Him, was a *liberating* Spirit, a Spirit that would empower all who were listless and burdened, struggling for breath and bread. As Christ proclaimed, the promises of Isaiah 61 and Luke 4 continue to be fulfilled in our own life and times as we breathe together of the Spirit. Purified by our Lenten journey, we are ready to share our breath and bread with all in need.

In his recent encyclical on Christian hope, Spe Salvi, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI described the mystery of our solidarity in Christ as “*plunging into the ocean of infinite love.*” He explains that Christ’s selfless love draws us into the whirlpool of His energy and compassion, and so, we find ourselves sharing in His loving concern for His Body, the Church. As Pope Benedict puts it, living for Christ means “*allowing ourselves to be drawn into His being for others.*” We

hope not just for our own personal salvation but, rather, we truly desire the salvation of all people – hence our mission of evangelization and our efforts to build up a society where the rights of all – especially the most vulnerable – are always affirmed.

As I reflect with you today on the theme of solidarity, I cannot help but recall our late Holy Father, the servant of God, Pope John Paul II, who – along with the people of Poland – embodied the power of this great virtue. I can still hear the echo of his stirring words spoken to many of us in Hamtramck over two decades ago: *“There, on the Baltic, the word ‘solidarity’ was spoken... today it rolls like a wide wave over the face of the world according to the principles of ‘all with all’ and ‘all for all’...”*

One hundred seventy-five years ago, our ancestors in the faith responded to Christ’s call to solidarity and created this great local Church of Detroit. The same Holy Spirit has been breathing upon and through us throughout our history – through years of growth and expansion, and in times of loss, diminishment, and transition. Many major corporations and businesses have come and gone but our hope endures and our solidarity in Christ remains. We live our solidarity in Christ as we share in His sacramental presence and as we celebrate and affirm our unity-in-diversity, respecting the wonderful mosaic of the many ethnic and racial traditions which are vital aspects of our living heritage of faith.

For 175 years, in different settings and circumstances – sometimes grand and joyous, and in other moments, modest and humble – priests, deacons, religious, and lay faithful have gathered for the Triduum observance. Even before they had the word “solidarity,” they were coming together in faith and hope as we do here and now. Now, we have the word – solidarity – and we have the theology and experience of our union in Christ. May we continue to live our solidarity as we work and pray with the mind and heart of Jesus Christ, whose dying prayer was that all might be one.

With one voice, may we proclaim our solidarity and live the great doxology we will pray later in this liturgy and throughout the Triduum, our prayer and pledge of solidarity in Christ: “*Through Him, with Him, in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, forever and ever. Amen.*”