

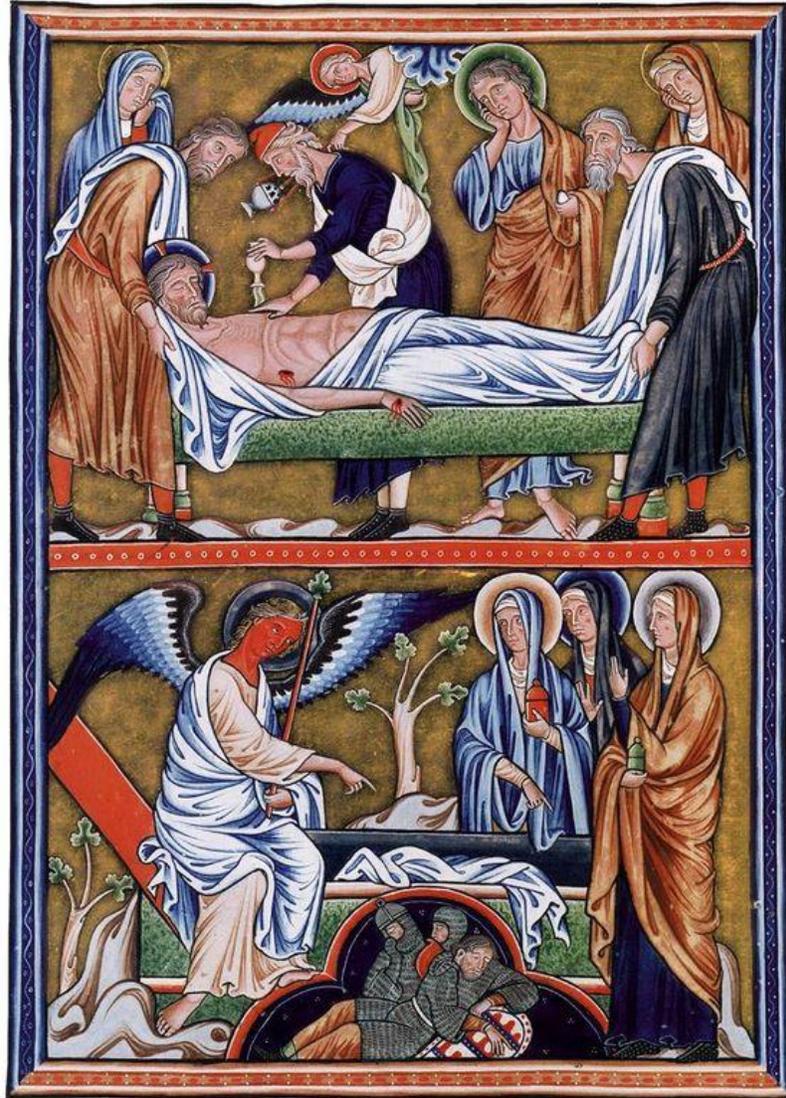
## "A Year Favorable"

Homily for the Chrism Mass 2020  
*Isaiah 61: 1-3, 6, 8-9; Revelation 1: 5-8; Luke 4:16-21*

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

"A year favorable to the Lord." That phrase, lifted from both Isaiah 61 and Luke 4 for this Chrism Mass, find its echo in the writings of Pope Francis on this COVID-19 pandemic. How could we possibly see this past year, with its illness and economic challenges, as "a year favorable to the Lord?"

The interpretative key is found in the beginning of both passages: anointing. After Jesus' death, the women come with perfumed oil to anoint the body, as was the burial custom. They had witnessed the brutal death of Jesus. Pinned to a cross, Jesus slowly weakened. The scent of his blood from his scourging most likely attracted vultures that would have come and picked at his flesh. On the cross, Jesus would have been unable to push himself upright in order to breathe. He slowly suffocated to death.



Surely after witnessing such a terrible death, the women had no hope that Jesus could possibly "rise from the dead." But the shock of an empty tomb and the message that He had risen from the dead left them holding the scented oil.

What happens with the oil? With the resurrection of Jesus and his conquering of death, the scented oil is no longer for the dead. It is for the living. It is the oil we bless today. The oil of the catechumens is meant to smooth the way for those we welcome into evangelizing the Church.

The oil of the sick is meant to soothe the suffering of the infirm and the dying. The scented oil of chrism anoints those we baptize, confirm and ordain.

Yet as Pope Francis so eloquently notes, this oil is also meant to touch and soothe a wounded world. Where are those wounds? I think of our priests here in the Diocese of Yakima. Fr. Alex Trejo was the first priest in the United States with the COVID-19 diagnosis. I think of the family of David Muñoz. David worked in a fruit packing plant and die of COVID-19. I think of the many essential workers in our fruit packing plants and warehouses sickened by COVID-19. I think of the many employers who could not secure protective gear for their workers right at the time Yakima County had the third highest rate of infection in the United States. I think of the many small business owners and their families who have struggled through the pandemic, as well as those who may well lose their small businesses due to COVID-19. I think of how the deep political, racial and social divisions in our country have magnified the human tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yet this is why I am so grateful to you, the priests here in the Diocese of Yakima. When our people could not come to Church you went out to them. You did so with masses on-line and in your parking lots. You found ways to safely celebrate funerals, weddings and the sacrament of penance. The same is true in your support of religious education. During my recent visit to Bridgeport, 15 parishioner families had lost their homes to wildfires. One of the parishioners was sharing with another parishioner about the Zoom class they are having for first communion preparation. The chrism of your priesthood even reached the fire zones of North Central Washington.

So, thank you. Thank you, Father David Jimenez and Monsignor Ron Metha, for your 25 years of priestly service. Thank you, Father Alberto Cerezo, Father John O'Shea and Father Seamus Kerr, for your 60 years of ministry. Thank you, the priests and deacons of the Diocese of Yakima, for allowing the oil of your ordination to drip out from our parishes and schools, even reaching out to our migrant camps. Thank you for the many patient lay faithful who have worked cooperatively with your parish clergy in finding ways to safely reopen our parishes and schools across Central Washington.

St. Augustine often reflected on the hard suffering he saw in the world. Why? Why, he wondered? He did not have an answer. But he did note the unusual way that goodness seemed to flourish in its proximity to evil.

This is what I see in all of you. You are instruments of God's grace. You allow God to bring good out of evil. You allow him to draw you into the proximity of political tension, human sickness and social suffering. You do so in order to allow the eternal reign of God to break into our wounded world. Like Pope Francis may we see the many ways this has been "a year favorable to the Lord."

Peace be with you!

Art: Miniature from Ingeborg Psalter, 13<sup>th</sup> Century. Anointing of dead body of Christ (John 19: 39-40); Women with chrism at the tomb (Luke 24:1). Public domain.