

- While in our diocese we celebrate the Chrism Mass on Tuesday morning of Holy Week, the Chrism Mass properly belongs on the morning of Holy Thursday. We celebrate it on Tuesday, though, to ensure that all the priests in the diocese can be there.
- Considering the geographic expanse of our diocese, it would be difficult for many of our priests to be in Charlotte for the Chrism Mass in the morning and still make it back to their parishes in time to prepare for the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday evening.
- While this is both necessary and practical, moving the Chrism Mass to Tuesday means we lose a little of the understanding of the importance of Holy Thursday to priests. More than any other day of the year, Holy Thursday is *our* day.
- For the Chrism Mass is not simply the Mass at which the holy oils to be used for the following year are consecrated. It's the Mass at which we priests renew our vows. It's our recommitment to a life of charitable service and faithful celebration of the sacraments.
- At the Chrism Mass we priests are so pointedly reminded of why we exist: to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God after the model of Christ our High Priest, so that we might sanctify all those entrusted to us.
- And then on Holy Thursday evening at the Mass of the Lord's Supper, as we celebrate the institution of both the priesthood and the Eucharist by our blessed Lord at the Last Supper, we carry out our primary duty as priests: to give life to souls through the Eucharist, no matter what the cost.
- You see, the Eucharist does not just drop down from Heaven on Its own. In His humility and love, God allows Himself to be brought into this world through human instrumentality.
- Indeed, the Eucharist relies on the priesthood for its very existence. It is the priest who confects the Eucharist. Without a priest saying the words of consecration that St. Paul speaks of in the second reading, those words remain precisely that: just words.
- But when said by a priest, those words can change ordinary bread and wine into God Himself!
- But priests are also dependent on the Eucharist. It is the Eucharist that gives the priest his identity and purpose. The Eucharist is the primary reason why we priests are ordained.
- So as we look to the two Masses proper to Holy Thursday, we can learn so much about what a priest is, and what a priest is called to do. As we pay attention to these two Masses, we learn just how beautiful and awesome the priesthood is.
- Sadly, so many priests today are grossly unaware of the great dignity conferred upon them at their ordination. In the past century, we've seen so many in the Church – priest and laity both – reduce the priesthood to social work, psychology, and sacramental dispensing.
- It's these misunderstandings of the priesthood that have allowed so many aberrations to slip into the liturgy. Its why sacraments are sometimes celebrated improperly and in sloppy fashion.
- Ironically, one of the people in the past century who understood priesthood best was a laywoman, the Venerable Catherine Doherty. In fact, Catherine wrote a short poem entitled "What is a Priest" that I keep pinned to the bulletin board above my desk.
- Here's what Catherine Doherty wrote:

*A PRIEST is a lover of God, a priest is a lover of men, a priest is a holy man because he walks before the face of the All-Holy.*

*A priest understands all things, a priest forgives all things, a priest encompasses all things. The heart of a priest is pierced, like Christ's with the lance of love. The heart of a priest is open, like Christ's for the whole world to walk through.*

*The heart of a priest is a vessel of compassion, the heart of a priest is a chalice of love, the heart of a priest is the trysting place of human and divine love.*

*A priest is a man whose goal is to be another Christ; a priest is a man who lives to serve.*

*A priest is a man who has crucified himself so that he too may be lifted up and draw all things to Christ.*

*A priest is a man in love with God. A priest is the gift of God to man and of man to God. A priest is the symbol of the word made flesh, a priest is the naked sword of God's justice, a priest is the hand of God's mercy, a priest is the reflection of God's love.*

*Nothing can be greater in this world than a priest, nothing but God Himself.*

- They are powerful words, and very true words at that. And every time I read them, I'm humbled, edified, and reproached all at once.
- I read this to you tonight not because I want you to exult me or any other priest. I give it to you so that you might understand the great gift God has given to all of us in His priesthood.
- At the same time, as we begin our sacred Triduum this evening, as we prepare to celebrate anew our Lord's suffering, death, and resurrection, I ask you to pray for priests.
- Pray that we might live up to these words, that we might embody with our words and actions the words and actions of Christ.
- Pray that we priests fulfill our duties properly, promptly, and always with great joy.
- Pray that more men will enter the priesthood: that more and more young men – especially from our parish and from our diocese – will hear the call to such a sublime vocation and respond generously.
- Pray for our weak priests, our fallen priests, the priests who betray their sacred call, that they may be strengthened by God's grace, that they may learn to live their priesthood with integrity, and that they may repent of whatever evil they commit.
- Pray for those of us who are lukewarm or lazy, for those priests who are disobedient and break their vows, that they may fall in love with the priesthood again.
- And pray that all of us priests may come to a greater, a deeper, and more abiding love for the Holy Eucharist, and that we may always celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass with tender devotion, filial piety, and rock-solid faith.
- As always, I am grateful to this parish for the love and support you've always shown me – even after nearly 18 years with you. Thank you for your prayers and encouragement, especially in the past few months; I've needed them, and I've felt them.
- I hope you'll forgive me for all the times that I've failed in my duties as your pastor and priest. But I also hope you know just how much this parish – and all of you – mean to me.
- As we celebrate tonight these two great gifts that Christ has given us: the Eucharist and the Priesthood, may we be ever grateful to Christ through whom these gifts are given to us.
- And may we ever trust in the priesthood and the Eucharist to save us from our sins and prepare us for the moment when we will come to face to face with Christ our great high priest.