

How Catholics Worship: What we do and why we do it.

The Chrism Mass



Office of
Evangelization and Worship

God's gift of oil made from the fruits of the earth has been an essential part of human history. It is a key ingredient in cooking, it is a fuel for lamps and stoves, it is a salve which soothes and strengthens. Oil has been used to designate a change in the relationship of a person within the community. Thus those who are designated priests, prophets, or rulers are anointed giving them their new status. It is out of this experience that the term Messiah, or in Greek: *Christos*, emerged to refer to God's anointed one. Like Jesus, Christians are anointed by the Holy Spirit designating that they are members of God's chosen people.

Catholics are called together each year for the celebration of the Mass of the Oils, during which the Holy Oils are blessed and the Sacred Chrism is consecrated. This celebration is one of the key times of the year that the many ministries of the Church are made manifest. The Chrism Mass reveals the nature of the local Church which gathers around its Bishop, who with the fullness of ordination, leads as both teacher and liturgist. The Chrism Mass also serves as an opportunity for all the pastoral leaders lay and clergy who serve with their bishop to renew their commitment to join with him in the ministry to the people through the exercise of our baptismal and ministerial priesthood.

The primary reason for the Chrism Mass is to bless the oils which will be used in ministry around the archdiocese.

The **Oil of the Sick**, to which Saint James refers (James 5:14) is used with the celebration of the anointing of the sick in order to bring God's strength to those in need. It is the prayer of the Church that those who celebrate this sacrament will bear the suffering caused by illness, to face the trials caused by advancing age, to remain steadfast in faith, and to obtain the forgiveness of sin.

The **Oil of Catechumens** is blessed to strengthen those preparing for baptism to avoid sin and to take on the habit of Christian living. Through this anointing, the Church prays that the catechumens will grow in faith and renounce all evil.



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The **Sacred Chrism** is consecrated by the Archbishop. In baptism Christians enter the womb of the Church to be reborn in Christ. As they emerge from the waters of baptism, they are anointed with Sacred Chrism to show their unity with Christ who was anointed as priest, prophet and king. Like Christ, all Christians are called to be disciples in mission, to proclaim the Good News of God's love, and to be faithful stewards of all that God has given them. Confirmation, which has its meaning only in relationship to baptism, symbolizes the gift of the Holy Spirit which has given new life. The Sacred Chrism is used in ordination liturgies and in the consecration of altars and churches. In each case, when Chrism is used there is an ontological change, which means that the identity of those or that being anointed is changed forever.

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Parish Reception of the Holy Oils Blessed at the Chrism Mass

1. It is appropriate that the oil of the sick, the oil of catechumens, and the Holy Chrism, which are blessed by the Archbishop during the Chrism Mass, be presented to and received by the local parish community.
2. The reception of the Holy Oils should take place at the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday or on another day after the celebration of the Chrism Mass.
3. The Oils should be reserved in a suitable repository (ambry) in the sanctuary or near the baptismal font.
4. The Oils, in suitable vessels, are carried in the procession of the gifts, before the bread and wine, by members of the assembly.
5. The Oils are received by the priest and are then placed on a suitably prepared table in the sanctuary or in the Ambry where they will be reserved.
6. As each of the Oils is presented, the following or other words may be used to explain the significance of the particular oil. The people's response should be sung.

- Presenter of the Oil of the Sick: **The Oil of the Sick.**

Priest: May the sick who are anointed with this oil experience the compassion of Christ and his saving love, in body and soul.

People respond or sing: **Blessed be God forever.**

- Presenter of the Oil of Catechumens: **The Oil of Catechumens.**

Priest: Through anointing with this oil may our catechumens who are preparing to receive the saving waters of baptism be strengthened by Christ to resist the power of Satan and reject evil in all its forms.

People respond or sing: **Blessed be God forever.**

- Presenter of the Holy Chrism: **The Holy Chrism.**

Priest: Through anointing with this perfumed Chrism may children and adults, who are baptized and confirmed, and presbyters who are ordained, experience the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit.

People respond or sing: **Blessed be God forever.**

The bread and wine for the Eucharist are then received and the Mass continues in the usual way.

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