

Homily based on the readings from February 9, 2025 (Isaiah 6.1-2a, 3-8; 1 Corinthians 15.1-11; Luke 5.1-11)

Many people here, I am sure, have had the opportunity at some point to attend a priestly ordination. There are many wonderful and important aspects of the ordination rite, but one of the most *memorable* is when the newly ordained priest has his *hands* anointed with Sacred Chrism – a special oil that is consecrated every year by the bishop. The reason his *hands*, in particular, are anointed is that they will be serving a *uniquely* sacred function: holding the bread and wine as they are transformed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The priest is still a mortal and fallible human being, but his *hands* have been set apart for a higher purpose.

Although it does not exactly relate to *ordination*, today's first reading presents a similar sort of *consecration* – an event where the *ordinary* is made *holy*. In an age when the Children of Israel had largely turned away from the Lord, a young man named Isaiah received a vision –

calling him to a life of prophetic ministry. As soon as he realized what was happening, Isaiah lamented – quite correctly – that he was unworthy to carry out the Lord’s mission: “I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips.” At that moment, one of the seraphim – one of God’s holy angels – touched Isaiah’s lips with an ember taken from the altar. For the rest of his life, Isaiah’s *mouth* was set apart for a higher purpose – to proclaim the words of *God* himself.

Even though most of us have never experienced anything *remotely* like what happened to Isaiah, there *are* actually echoes of this consecration in our daily lives. Shortly after an infant is baptized, for example, the priest or the deacon gently touches the child’s ears and lips – while reciting the following prayer:

May the Lord Jesus, who made the deaf to hear and the mute to speak, grant that you may soon receive his word with your ears and profess the faith with your lips, to the glory and praise of God the Father.

In fact, every time the Gospel is read at Mass, we cross ourselves three times with our right thumb – as we ask the Lord to be in our mind, on our lips, and in our heart. Every single one of us is called to participate, in our own way, in prophetically witnessing to the love and mercy of Jesus Christ.

I certainly hope that there is at least *one* person in this congregation right now who will someday be ordained a priest – whose hands will be anointed with Sacred Chrism. Nevertheless, *all* of us who are fully initiated Catholics have been anointed with Chrism as well – most likely at our baptism and *definitely* at our confirmation. Once we are sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit, our entire *being* becomes an instrument of God’s saving grace. All of us – who are privileged to bear the name of *Christian* – must pray for the *courage* and the *humility* to echo Isaiah’s response to the angel of the Lord: “Here I am; send me!”