

Homily based on the readings from January 17, 2026 (1 Samuel 9.1-4, 17-19, 10.1; Mark 2.13-17)

As you may be aware, the title *Christ* is simply the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*, which literally means “anointed one.” Even though Jesus is clearly *the* Messiah – *the* anointed one – it is important to remember that there were many lesser messiahs who came before him. During the days of ancient Israel, numerous individuals – prophets, priests, and kings – were set apart in a *variety* of ways to serve the Lord and his Chosen People.

Today’s first reading introduces us to one of the earliest messiahs – namely Saul, the first king of the Israelites. At the Lord’s command, the Prophet Samuel “poured oil on Saul’s head,” declaring:

The LORD anoints you commander over his heritage.

You are to govern the LORD’s people Israel,

and to save them from the grasp of their enemies roundabout.

Saul is clearly set apart for a special mission – consecrated for a holy purpose. Unfortunately, as you probably know, things did not ultimately turn out well for him. Because of his unwillingness to follow the Lord’s explicit commands – as we will hear this coming Monday – Saul lost his kingship over Israel, eventually perishing in a protracted civil war with David and his supporters. Despite this fact, Saul’s status as an *anointed one* – as a *messiah* – was never fully revoked. Even in the midst of their violent confrontation, David refused to harm Saul in any way, telling his men:

The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, to lay a hand on him, for he is the LORD’s anointed.

In other words, God’s anointing leaves a mark that can never be erased. Once a person is set apart for service to the Lord, that calling is indelible.

It is unlikely, of course, that any of us will ever assume the office of king or queen. Nevertheless, as Christians – as followers of the one *true* Christ – each of us has received our own sacred anointing. It is no accident that the words *Christ* and *Chrism* sound so similar: *Chrism* is the oil of anointing and *Christ* is the one who *is* anointed. Every fully initiated Catholic has been anointed with Sacred Chrism – most likely at baptism and *definitely* at confirmation. Once we are sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit, our entire *being* becomes an instrument of God's saving grace. No matter how seriously – or how often – we stray from the path of righteousness, that consecration can never be undone. This fact is both an *indescribable* comfort and an *astounding* responsibility. We know with absolute *certainty* that God will never give up on *any* of us, but *we* – for our part – must *always* be willing to return to him.