

BEHIND THE CHRISM MASS



DIOCESE of ERIE
Sharing the Catholic faith in northwest Pennsylvania

A conversation with the Office for Divine Worship



Once a year, the entire Diocese of Erie gathers around its bishop for a liturgy that quietly shapes every sacrament that will be celebrated in the months ahead.

The Chrism Mass is not simply another Holy Week celebration. It is the moment when the holy oils are blessed and consecrated — oils that will travel from Saint Peter Cathedral to every parish, hospital room, prison ministry and bedside across northwestern Pennsylvania. What happens in one sacred hour will touch baptisms, confirmations, anointings and ordinations throughout the year.

Behind that seamless celebration stands the Office for Divine Worship. Here, they take us behind the scenes of one of the most significant liturgies in the life of our diocesan church.

WHEN DOES PLANNING FOR THE CHRISM MASS ACTUALLY BEGIN?

Planning conversations usually begin a month or two in advance, but the hands-on preparation intensifies about two weeks before Lent as liturgical details, ministers and logistics are finalized.

WHY IS THIS MASS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST COMPLEX LITURGIES OF THE YEAR?

Because it brings together more people, ministries, ritual elements and sacred objects than almost any other diocesan celebration — all unfolding with exact liturgical precision.

HOW IS PLANNING THIS DIFFERENT FROM A PARISH MASS?

A parish liturgy serves one community. The Chrism Mass serves the entire diocese — every parish, priest and sacramental celebration for the coming year.

HOW MANY PRIESTS ARE INVOLVED?

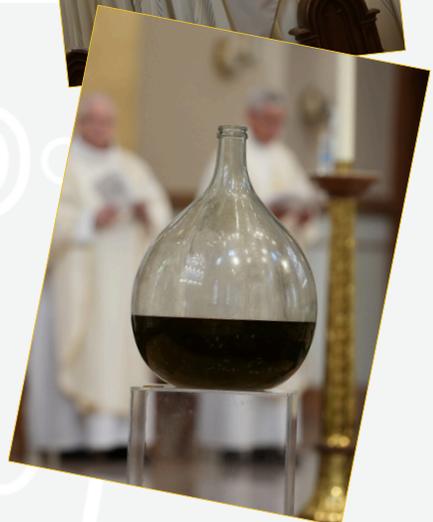
Nearly the entire presbyterate participates — active priests, retired clergy and religious order priests, roughly around 100.

AND BEYOND PRIESTS?

Deacons, seminarians, altar servers, musicians and liturgical ministers — more than 50 visible ministers, with many more serving behind the scenes.

WHAT IS HAPPENING THAT PEOPLE IN THE PEWS MAY NOT REALIZE?

Every movement is choreographed — seating charts, procession routes, vessels, oils and ritual actions are all carefully coordinated.





WHAT MAKES THIS MASS UNIQUE IN THE CHURCH YEAR?

It is the only Mass where the holy oils are blessed and consecrated for the entire year.

WHY ARE THERE THREE DIFFERENT OILS?

Each serves a distinct sacramental purpose: healing, strengthening and consecrating the faithful at different moments of life.



WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE SACRED CHRISM?

It is the only oil consecrated — not just blessed — by the bishop and is infused with balsam fragrance symbolizing the “fragrance of Christ.”

WHY MUST THE BISHOP CONSECRATE IT HIMSELF?

Because it represents his ministry as chief shepherd. Every sacrament using Chrism is directly connected to his pastoral leadership.

WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE WATCH FOR DURING THE LITURGY?

The renewal of priestly promises and the consecration of the Chrism — especially when the bishop breathes over the oil, invoking the Holy Spirit.





WHY DO PRIESTS RENEW THEIR PROMISES?

It is a return to their ordination “yes” — a public recommitment to serve Christ and His people.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE OILS IMMEDIATELY AFTER MASS?

They are transferred into smaller vessels, bottled, packaged and organized for distribution.

WHO HELPS WITH THAT PROCESS?

Volunteers and assistants carefully fill and package the oils while distribution systems are set up.

HOW MANY PARISHES RECEIVE OILS?

Every parish in the Diocese of Erie — more than 70 — along with Catholic institutions.

WHERE ARE THE OILS KEPT ONCE THEY ARRIVE?

They are stored in an ambry — a sacred cabinet in the church that honors their sacramental purpose.

HOW FAR DO THESE OILS REACH BEYOND PARISH WALLS?

They accompany priests into hospitals, nursing homes, prisons and places of suffering — bringing Christ’s healing presence to those who may never enter a church.

WHY IS THE CHRISM MASS SO IMPORTANT FOR THE DIOCESE?

Because it is a visible sign that we are one church. One bishop, one presbyterate and one sacramental life shared across every parish. What is blessed at the cathedral flows outward — touching baptisms, anointings, confirmations and ordinations all year long.



CHRISM MASS

MONDAY, MARCH 30

1:00 P.M. MASS WITH BISHOP PERSICO

ST. PETER CATHEDRAL, ERIE

ALL ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND