



Q: What is the Chrism Mass?

A: Generally once a year, the bishop, joined by the priests of the diocese, gather at St. John’s Cathedral to celebrate the Chrism Mass. This Mass manifests the unity of the priests with their bishop, and it serves to supply the diocese with the necessary sacred oils — the oil of catechumens (*oleum catechumenorum* or *oleum sanctorum*), the oil of the infirm (*oleum infirmorum*) and holy chrism (*sacrum chrisma*) — which will be used in the administration of the sacraments throughout the diocese for the year. This tradition is rooted in the early Church as noted in the *Gelasian Sacramentary* (named after Pope Gelasius I, d. 496).

Throughout the Bible, various references indicate the importance of olive oil in daily life. Sacred Scripture also attests to the spiritual symbolism of oil. Given this heritage, the early Church adopted the use of olive oil for its sacramental rituals.

The Oil of Catechumens is used in connection with the sacrament of baptism. St. Hippolytus, in his *Apostolic Tradition* (A.D. 215), wrote of an “oil of exorcism” used to anoint the candidates immediately before baptism. This practice continues: In the current baptismal liturgy, the priest offers the prayer of exorcism and then with the oil of catechumens anoints the person to be baptized on the chest, saying, “We anoint you with the oil of salvation in the name of Christ our Savior; may He strengthen you with His power, Who lives and reigns forever and ever.”

The oil of the infirm is used in the sacrament of the anointing of the sick (formerly known as extreme unction). The *Apostolic Tradition* of St. Hippolytus recorded one of the earliest formulas for blessing the oil of the infirm. Presently, the priest, anointing the forehead of the person, says, “Through this holy anointing, may the Lord in His love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit,” and then anointing his hands, says, “May the Lord who frees you from sin, save you and raise you up.”

Finally, holy chrism is a mixture of olive oil and balsam, an aromatic resin. This oil is linked with the sanctification of individuals. In the Old Testament times, the priest, prophets and kings of the Jewish people were anointed. This oil is used in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and holy orders, since they impart an indelible sacramental character. The blessing of the holy chrism is different from that of the other oils: Here the bishop breathes over the vessel of chrism, a gesture which symbolizes both the Holy Spirit coming down to consecrate this oil, and the life-giving, sanctifying nature of the sacraments for which it is used. (Recall how our Lord “breathed” on the Apostles on the night of Easter, saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Jn 20:22).) In the sacrament of confirmation, the bishop anoints the forehead of the candidate with chrism saying, “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Sacred chrism is also used in the sacrament of holy orders. In the ordination rite of a priest, the bishop anoints with chrism the palms of each new priest. In the ordination rite of a bishop, the consecrating bishop anoints the head of the new bishop. Finally, holy chrism is used in the dedication ceremony of a church.

As our bishop blesses these three oils at the Chrism Mass, our hearts turn to our gracious Lord who bestows His infinite love and mercy to us through these sacraments. Let us also pray for our bishop and the priests who are the ministers of the sacraments in the parish, that they may be the humble and generous servants of the Lord.



[SOURCE: <https://catholicexchange.com/what-is-the-chrism-mass>]