

# New Chrism Consecrated During Holy Week Services

Holy Chrism, a special oil used in the Sacrament of Chrismation as well as for the dedication of churches, altars and antimensia, was consecrated at the St. Sergius Chapel in the Metropolitan's Chancery, Syosset, N.Y., this past Holy Week. His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius, presided over the four-day rite which concluded at the Vespertal Liturgy of St. Basil the Great on Holy Thursday. He was assisted by Archpriest Daniel Hubiak, Chancellor of the OCA, and other members of the Chancery staff.

Holy Thursday has been selected by the Church as the day for the consecration of Holy Chrism for a number of reasons. One interpretation, stressing the Gospel's chronology, points out that Jesus Himself was anointed with precious myrrh just before His Passion (cf. Matt. 26:3-12, Mk. 14:3-8; John 12:1-8). Thus, the consecration of Chrism in the Church coincides with this event. A more obvious interpretation associates the consecration of Holy Chrism with the actual purpose for which this sacred oil is prepared: the anointing of the newly baptized. Holy Thursday marked the conclusion of the catechumenate, and thus, the day for the consecration of the sacred oil (prepared in sufficient quantity) to be used in the Chrismation of those about to be baptized on Pascha.

## Preliminary Ceremonies

All the ingredients used in the making of Holy Chrism were assembled in the St. Sergius Chapel on the morning of Holy Monday. The Metropolitan conducted the rite of the Lesser Blessing of Water. With this water he then blessed a quantity of olive oil and white wine, along with some sixteen different resins and natural essences (balsam, plant root extracts, tree gums, rose and sandalwood oils and the like).

A portion of the sanctified water was then poured into a special cooking vessel (located over carefully regulated heat), some of the white wine was added, and the cooking commenced. It continued until the late afternoon of Holy Wednesday. Except for those times when the regular services of Holy Week were



(Top) Metropolitan Theodosius blessed ingredients for Chrism, while Frs. Paul Kucynda and Daniel Hubiak pour wine and water into oil. (R. top) Fr. James Mason stirs Chrism while Fr. Dimitri Oselinsky reads the Gospel. (R. bottom) Metropolitan Theodosius receives previously consecrated Chrism from Fr. Robert Kondratck during the Great Entrance.

being conducted, the Holy Gospel was continuously read by a priest; the chrism was constantly stirred by a deacon or another priest. In this aspect of the ritual of consecration, the stirring and reading, clergy from throughout the greater metropolitan New York area and from as far away as Chicago participated. It was as if the entire content of the Christian Gospel was being gradually mixed into the constantly moving oil by the assembled Church. The "Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit" is really, as St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, "the gift of Christ": an anointment to be faithful to the *whole* Gospel. Such was the witness of the Athonite elder Silouan (+1938). He said that a person can be sure that the spirit in him is the Holy Spirit when his "soul experiences the *whole content* of the teaching and commandments of Christ," i.e., the *entire Gospel* (cf. *Wisdom from Mt. Athos*, p. 12).

Fidelity to the Gospel, whole and entire, is the very task and nature of the Church. This task is personified in the Primate of the Church, the bearer of the Church's unity and the

one who must "rightly define the word of Thy Truth." It is no accident, then, that he presides at the consecration of the Holy Chrism, and that the prayers speak of this sacred oil as imparting the seal by which each Christian is marked as a faithful member of Christ's chosen flock: "a holy nation, a royal priesthood . . . kings and prophets wearing the garment of incorruption . . . perfectly sealed with Christ Himself in their hearts — the Myrrh which fills all of creation with a holy fragrance" (from the prayer of consecration).

## Holy Wednesday

After the stirring stopped on Holy Wednesday, the chrism was allowed to cool. The many resins and natural

essences were then added. These point to the cosmical nature of this sacramental act. In Christ, all things are "made new." He renews the creation which is "groaning and in travail" and fills it with His holy fragrance. The many ingredients serve also to underscore the understanding that *many gifts* are inspired by the "seal" of the one Gift: the Holy Spirit.

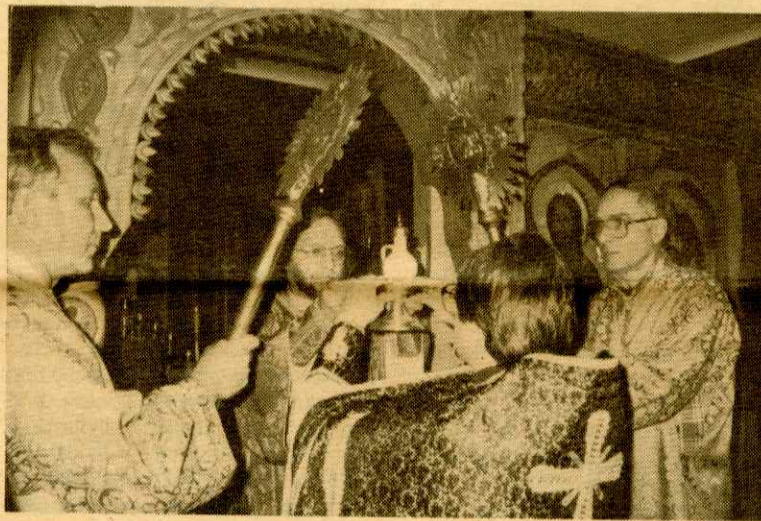
Finally, the mixture was poured into several containers which were placed on a table near the Table of Oblation. There they remained until the Great Entrance of Holy Thursday's Vespertal Liturgy.

## Holy Thursday

Prior to the beginning of the Vespertal Liturgy on Holy Thursday, Chrism remaining from previous years was transferred to the Table of Oblation. During the Great Entrance of this Liturgy, the already consecrated Chrism was carried first in the order of procession, before the holy gifts of bread and wine. After the holy gifts came the vessels of the chrism newly prepared for consecration.

The Metropolitan received everything in order and placed each item in its appropriate place on the altar table. The vessels containing the new chrism were placed around the edges of the holy table. The Liturgy continued as usual. The holy gifts were sanctified to be the very Body and Blood of Christ. The Metropolitan blessed the people: "And the mercies of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, shall be with all of you." The time for the consecration of the new chrism had arrived.

The vessels were opened, and after blessing each vessel three times, the Metropolitan chanted the two prayers of consecration (portions of which were cited earlier). Similar in this respect to the Eucharistic Anaphora, the prayers seem to follow the pattern: remembrance, consecration, fulfillment. God's mighty acts are recalled; grace is begged for the completion of "this great and life-creating mystery;" fulfillment of the mystery is anticipated in the lives of the many people who have been and will be anointed with the Holy Chrism.



Metropolitan Theodosius pours the previously consecrated Chrism into the containers of new Chrism.

After the prayers of consecration the Liturgy continued to its conclusion. Following the dismissal, any Chrism remaining from previous years was distributed among the vessels of the newly consecrated Chrism. Then the nearly empty vessel which had contained the old Chrism was filled with a portion from each of the containers of the new Chrism. This continuity in the Chrism, consecrated as it is by the Primate of the Church, serves as a visible, tangible sign of the very continuity of the Church, coming down to us from Christ to the apostles, and from the apostles to those on whom they laid their hands as their successors: the bishops.

The Holy Chrism is distributed as needed throughout the Church by the Diocesan Bishops.

Fr. Paul Lazor ■