# "The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit!"

Today's epistle reading connects us with the Orthodox sacrament of Holy Chrismation. That is what I want to talk to you about this morning - the sacrament of Holy Chrismation. As you may know, there is a special oil in our Church called "Holy Myron" (in Greek) or "Holy Chrism." (show bottle). This oil is used exclusively for special occasions. It's not the same as the oil that is used for healing - that oil is "Holy Unction." So, there's holy Chrism and there's Holy Unction -- two oils [show both]. Holy Chrism (Myron) is used for the sacrament of Chrismation. It's used to anoint a person after they have been baptized. It is also used for chrismating a person who converts to the Orthodox faith. And it's used to consecrate a new church, an altar or holy icons. So after a person is baptized, or a convert joins the Church, or there is a new church, a new altar, or new icons -- all are anointed with this special oil called "Holy Chrism" or the "Myron." What makes this oil special and different from the oil that is used for healing in the sacrament of Holy Unction is the person who prepares it, the way it is made, and what it signifies.

For us Antiochians, the person who prepares the Holy *Chrism* -- which is what I'm focusing on now -- is our patriarch: His Beatitude, John X. The patriarch resides in Damascus, Syria and also lives in the Balamand Monastery in Lebanon. He has residences in both places.

I think you'll enjoy learning how this special Holy Chrism/Myron is prepared. It's fascinating. The Patriarch, along with a gathering of other bishops and clergy, boils a vat of olive oil. And this is done during Holy Week, on Holy Thursday. And while it's boiling, they place a number of different herbs and fragrant spices into the oil. The exact number of spices and kinds of spices differs slightly from church to church -- the Russians use a certain number of spices while the Greeks or Romanians use another, and so on. But typically there are from 25 to 50 or more different spices that are used. The recipe calls for pure virgin olive oil and rose water, and can include cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, frankincense, and spices from around the world. I have heard that our Patriarch possibly uses 99 different herbs. As the oil is being prepared, the clergy read the Gospels over a period of at least 24 hours along with other prayers and hymns. At the end, the Patriarch gives the full

blessing and then sends the chrism to other bishops who distribute it to the priests, and then the priest uses it to chrismate people after their baptism or their entrance into the church.

The symbolism of the finished oil is beautiful: The many fragrances *symbolize the multifaceted gifts of the Holy Spirit and the renewal of human nature. The oil signifies a person's personal Pentecost -- the coming of the Holy Spirit upon an individual believer. The Spirit joins the holy oil to impart spiritual gifts to a believer and make them a temple of God*. Through the anointing of the body with Holy Chrism, the person receives "power from on high" to live their new life. They become a "Temple" of the Holy Spirit, to use the language of St Paul in today's epistle readi. The Holy Fathers describe the baptized person as becoming a "christ" (an anointed son or daughter of God) upon whom and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. The anointing sets that person apart and empowers them to sanctify their whole life unto Christ our God. And so St Paul says: *"What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God… Therefore, 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.' … Therefore, having*

*these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."*

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he was writing to people who were living in a seaport city that was filled with idols and a highly sexualized culture. The Temple of Aphrodite was there and the historian, Strabo, noted that there were 1,000 religious prostitutes connected with it. People would engage in fornication and other sexual sins as part of Aphrodite's worship. People who engaged in that type of thing were sometimes labeled as being "Corinthianized." That's where some of the people came from who became Christians when St Paul preached the Gospel there. That's some of the background they brought into the Church. To live in Corinth was to be bombarded every day by a culture demanding your desires. -- Not very different from our world, wouldn't you say? Our culture is saturated with fleshly desires such as gluttony, lust, and self-centeredness. It was into that world that St Paul poses a question that sounds a trumpet across our modern American life:

**"*What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God...Therefore, 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord.*" Be separate.**

You see, when you were baptized, or when you came to faith in Jesus Christ, something great happened: God moved in! He was born inside of you. You weren't just joined to a social organization; you became a sanctuary, a temple of the living God. Now, if God lives in us, that changes how we think, how we talk, the places we go and the friends we make. "*Therefore," says Paul, "having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."* So the big question is, *"How do we keep this temple clean?* How do we live as Orthodox Christians in a world that is constantly undermining our values and trying to change how we think and act through websites, I-Phones, movies, TV shows and even in some of our schools and classmates. When you look to your personal Pentecost—to this sacred mystery of Chrismation -- when you emerged from the baptismal waters, or when you joined the Orthodox Church, the priest took that sweet *Chrism* and anointed all the senses of your body. And as he did so with every sign of the Cross he declared:

**“The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit!” And the people responded "Amen"!** In that moment, God didn't just clean house; He consecrated every door and window in your life! Let’s go back to those sacred moments and walk through the seven gates of your living temple, from top to bottom.

Honestly, whenever I think of anointing from head to toe I can't help but recall that old children's song:

"*Head and shoulders, knees and toes! Knees and Toes. Head and shoulders, knees and toes. Knees and Toes, eyes and ears and mouth and nose, head and shoulders knees and toes! Knees and toes."*

Well, the Church has its own version of that little song and it goes like this (but without the music!):

**1. Forehead**

When the priest traced the sign of the cross on your forehead and declared, "The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit," he was consecrating your mind—your thoughts, memories, and imagination. Are there painful memories that need healing this morning? Have you weathered rough seasons that left emotional scars? The Holy Oil of Chrismation marks a fresh start, offering a entirely new lens through which to view your past.

I was reminded of this recently when Metropolitan Saba visited St. Mary's. During a Q&A session at dinner, a young man stepped up to the microphone and asked, "How can I stop thinking negatively about others? I'm constantly bombarded by intrusive, evil thoughts." The bishop turned to a monk sitting nearby for counsel. In short, the monk replied, *"Your thoughts determine your life. What you dwell on is what you become. So, train your mind to think as God thinks."* That wisdom connects directly to the Scripture memory challenge we are embracing here at Holy Trinity. Here is a vital spiritual principle to live by: the more deeply you know and obey Scripture, the healthier your mind becomes. As Jesus declared, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4). In a digital age driven by algorithms engineered to stoke envy, anger, and lust, an anointed mind refuses the clickbait of our culture and anchors its attention on the life-giving words of Holy Scripture.

**2. Eyes**

Next, the priest makes the sign of the cross on your eyelids with Holy Chrism. The eyes are the windows to the soul. As St. John Chrysostom urged, *"Let no evil thing enter through these*

*sacred windows!"* Jesus said, *"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light."* Yet it is very easy to let our eyes draw us into envy—constantly wanting what our neighbors have—or into lust, which treats people as objects rather than as bearers of God's image. Because our eyelids are sealed with the Holy Spirit, we are called to guard what we look at. When we guard our hearts and clean our windows, we begin to experience Jesus' words: *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."*

**3. Ears**

The priest then applies the holy oil to your *ears,* consecrating the doorway of sound so your hearing would become finely tuned to the voice of the Holy Spirit. St Chrysostom exhorted his flock: *"Shut your ears tight against malicious gossip, lest by listening to the poison of others you become an accomplice to their murder."* I would say it this way: "Don't let other people dump their trash into your ears." The chrismated ear refuses to hear slander and gossip that can harm the reputation of others.

**4. Nose**

The priest then moves to the nostrils. Holy Chrism is infused with the sweet smells of myrrh, cinnamon, rose water and other spices. It reminds us that the Christian life carries a certain aroma wherever it goes. I hate to put it this way, but how do smell when you're around others? An anointed Christian doesn't bring the foul smell of pride or drama into a room—they bring a sweet, fragrant atmosphere of Christ! This sweetness is detectable in the lives of some of our great saints. Take St Herman of Alaska, for example. Living on the remote Spruce Island in Alaska in the 18th century, he brought a peaceful, radiant presence of the Holy Spirit to the Native Alaskan people. Decades after he died, his body was dug up and his bones exuded a sweet fragrance that filled the air—a physical sign of the sweet Holy Spirit that permeated his entire life. As St Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians (2:15): *"For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing."*

**5. Mouth**

The priest then marked your *lips* with the sign of the Cross saying again, "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit." I don't

know about you, but I've noticed more vulgarity these days among politicians and podcasters than ever before. In days gone by, people would never in public use the "f" word or foul language that damned God, or blurt out a string of obsenities like they are doing today. They probably *thought* about saying those words, but almost nobody wouldn't come right out and say them on TV or in public. Now they seem to be doing it more and more. I'm sometimes even hearing little kids use vulgar language, and the parents let them. But that is not how a Christian is supposed to talk. In Ephesians 2, St Paul said, "*Do not let any unwholesome words proceed from your mouth, but only what helps build others up...."* And the third of the Ten Commandments says, "*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."* An anointed mouth is an instrument of truth, healing, and encouragement.

**6. Hands**

The priest moves down the body to anoint the palms and backs of your *hands*, consecrating your daily work to be the hands of Christ in this world. Friends, true holiness isn't just folding your hands in prayer—it’s rolling up your sleeves in service to your own family and to others who are in need.

**7. Feet**

Finally, the priest marked your *feet* with the holy oil, sanctifying the direction of your life. We are to walk in the way of holiness. "Be holy, for I am holy" said the Lord. On the one hand, that means stay out of sinful places. But on the other hand it means go to where the needs are great. I think of St Innocent of Alaska. As a fearless missionary bishop in the 19th century, St Innocent traveled thousands of miles across the frozen tundras of Russia. He went through rugged wilderness by kayak, dog sled, and on foot. His feet took him to the remote native villages of Alaska so he could translate the Scriptures, Fathers and liturgy into the Alaskan language.

**Conclusion**

Friends, Jesus died to make His bride, the church, *beautiful.* We are His temple; we are His hands; we are His sweet aroma; we are His voice, hands and feet. May the words of Isaiah the prophet find their fulfillment in us when he proclaims: *"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news..." (Isaiah 52.4).*

**In the Name...**