

OLIVE OIL/ANOINTING/THE MESSIAH

Today I would like to talk to you about olives and olive oil. Olives are a very ancient food source especially in the Mediterranean basin but not exclusively so. For well over a thousand years before Christ there are archeological traces of olives from ancient Persia throughout the Middle East and all across Europe to the Iberian Peninsula, Spain and Portugal. I tried to find out how much olive oil is consumed annually but each site I Googled would take me so far and then I had to subscribe to their website for a fee. Who knew how closely guarded a secret is olive oil production.

In antiquity olives were a ready food source for many people. The juice of the crushed olive was saved in large pots and medium-sized jars and in smaller containers. It was often used in bartering for other food items. In Israel, the olive was eaten, the olive oil was used in cooking and olive oil was also used as an ointment for medicinal purposes much like we rub ointment into sore muscles or achy bones. Olives and olive oil were life-giving, life sustaining and life healing.

When olive oil was rubbed onto our skin a sheen would be left and over time that sheen became a sign of good health and then of physical strength. Over centuries in Israel in the world of politics, kings would have olive oil poured on them as a sign of their leadership strength. Generals would also as a sign of their military prowess and strength. Judges too as a sign of their wisdom. This use of olive oil was viewed as an enhancement of the strength of the person. They were being designated and they were being empowered for office, empowered to serve.

In the world of the Jewish religion olive oil was also used to anoint prophets and priests again designating them for a particular office or for a particular function or service. When you add in the healing dimension of olive oil the priest or prophet or king was often looked upon not only as one who could lead and motivate but also someone who could heal those wounded by the stressors of life.

Slowly, over centuries, God revealed and so there grew an understanding that there would come one day a leader who would truly shepherd his people, who would fight for the truth with great strength and who would have the power both to liberate those enslaved and to heal those destroyed by sin or evil. This Son of Man as he was called would also be anointed. As a matter of fact he would be known as The Anointed One. The Hebrew word for Anointed One is Messiah. The Greek word for the Anointed One is Christos. So when Jesus of Nazareth comes on the scene of the early first century curing those who were sick or chronically ill; raising the dead, calming the storms of nature, feeding the hungry, comforting the afflicted, setting captives free—people began to name Jesus as the Messiah, as the Anointed One, as the Christ. Jesus. Christ.

But when does Jesus get anointed? In the Garden of Gethsemane. A Gethsemane is an olive press. A stone contraption into which you would dump baskets of olives and then huge heavy stone would be placed on top of the olives crushing them with their weight. At

the bottom of the olive press was a small spigot and then a site for a jar or container would be placed as the crushed olives slowly gave up their juice in a drip drip into the container. In the gospel of St. Luke we learned that on the night of his betrayal Jesus perspired so intensely that the drops became like drops of blood pointing to what would happen the next day on Calvary. And the drip of the olive oil in the Gethsemane and the drip of the perspiration under the crushing weight of the sins of the world becomes the moment when Jesus is anointed and literally becomes the Messiah, the King of the Jews. He will die the next day because of that reality.

Jesus is our Messiah and Lord. You notice that I am wearing rose vestments today. This is Gaudete Sunday. A Sunday for rejoicing as Christmas draws near. But there is another reason for rejoicing. All of us here today have been anointed ourselves. And several times. In the moment of our baptism, the olive oil of the catechumens was placed on the breastbone over the heart designating the child as a suitable candidate to be baptized and whose heart will now belong to Christ. After the baptismal waters are poured the child's head is anointed with olive oil to which perfume has been added. This olive oil is then called chrism. It takes place on the crown of the head. We become adopted children of Christ sharing in his inheritance.

In Confirmation we take on a new name, a new role model, a saint as we are sealed with chrism on our foreheads, sealed with the Holy Spirit, designated and strengthened for service. When we are ill we are anointed on forehead and hands with the oil of salvation for our healing—spiritually, physically, emotionally, psychologically. So. How many times have you been anointed personally with the Holy Spirit? Two in baptism. Once at Confirmation. Perhaps anointing of the sick. Me at my ordination with chrism placed on my hands.

You and I have been anointed. Anointed with the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus was anointed with the Spirit of the Living God. Which is precisely what Isaiah the prophet said in today's first reading. Why are we anointed? For the same reason Jesus was—to take on a particular role in this life and to fulfill that role. For most people that role is first to be spouse to a beloved. Then to be father or mother to their children. Then to be grandmom or Poppy for their grandchildren. You are anointed for a role, for a purpose. You are anointed with the Holy Spirit just as Jesus was. You have been given what you need to live your role and complete your task as best you can. I want you to just sit with that truth for a moment. You have been anointed too. Several times. With the Holy Spirit. So that you can do what the Lord asks of you. Isn't that good? Isn't that mindful on the Lord's part? Do you remember that you have been anointed? Do you remind yourself each day? Why? Because it really makes a difference in our lives if we believe in the anointing with the Holy Spirit we have received. What do you think it was that enabled Jesus to carry that cross and die on it for you and me if not the anointing with the Spirit that made him Messiah? When you doubt or mistrust or grow unsure. Let yourself remember that you have already been anointed and so have the people you are praying and hoping for.