

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

The Sacrament of Healing and Mercy

*Is anyone among you sick?
Let him call for the priests of the church
and let them pray over him,
anointing him with oil
in the name of the Lord:
And the prayer of faith
will save the sick man,
and the Lord will raise him up;
and if he has committed sins,
he will be forgiven.*

(James 5:14-15)



The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is a powerful and effective sign of Jesus' presence that brings strength and healing to the sick, the elderly and the dying. The celebration of the sacrament can help the sick face their illness with faith and trust, and the dying continue their faith journey to God in heaven.

Jesus healed all who came and asked. Healing the sick was the hallmark of Jesus' ministry. The passages from Mark's Gospels that are being proclaimed during this section of Ordinary Time give us examples of this. Wherever He went, people brought the sick to Jesus, and He healed them.

Our mission as Church is to continue the ministry of Jesus. Healing was central to the mission of Jesus and essential to the mission of the disciples: "He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two....they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them" (Mark 6:7-13). The early Church continued the healing ministry of Jesus (see the reference to the letter of James above).

Over time, the focus of the sacrament changed from that of Jesus and the disciples. The emphasis became more on forgiveness of sins than healing. Because of this, the reception of the sacrament was usually delayed until the end of one's life. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains this change: "Over the centuries the Anointing of the Sick was conferred more and more exclusively on those at the point of death. Because of this it received the name *Extreme Unction*. (CCC1512) This name described what the sacrament had become, the last anointing, the unction (anointing) in *extremis*.

Celebrating this sacrament in this way privatized the sacrament to a great degree. It was more likely to be celebrated one on one with a priest rather than within the community.

One of the objectives of the Second Vatican Council was to return more closely to the practices of the early church. In reflecting on Extreme Unction, the Council discerned that it was proper to celebrate the sacrament in the context of mutual prayer and concern as was described in the Epistle of James, quoted at the beginning of this article. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy instructed that it “is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*- article 73) but is meant to be celebrated by all those who are seriously ill. To reflect this understanding the name of the Sacrament was changed more appropriately to “The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*- article 73).

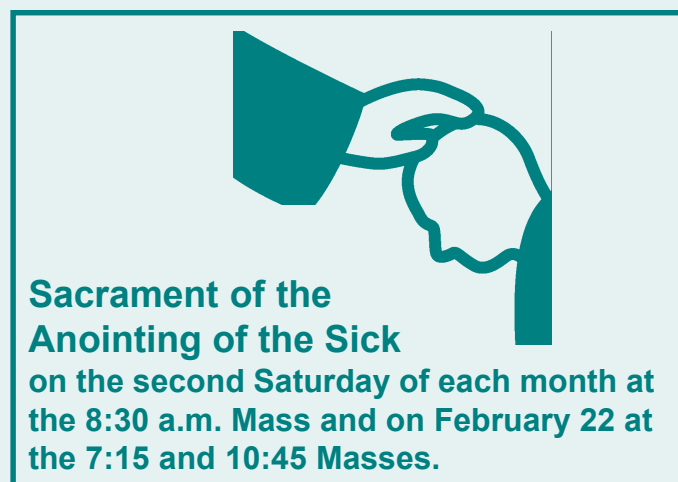
Today the Church continues the healing ministry of Jesus through the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Along with the change of the name has come a change in the way we think about the sacrament. We recognize that this sacrament (like all of the sacraments) should be celebrated within the community. It is preferable to celebrate this sacrament with family and parish community present offering prayers and support.

We know, too, that The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick heals us through faith. Sacraments are acts of faith. In the light of faith, we believe that this sacrament offers a different kind of healing than chemicals, medicine or surgery can offer. It offers grace for the whole person, healing of body, mind and spirit. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that it conveys several graces and imparts gifts of strengthening in the Holy Spirit against anxiety, discouragement, and temptation, and conveys peace and fortitude (CCC1520). The prayers for the blessing of the oil that is used during the celebration of the sacrament seek God to “send the power of Your Holy Spirit, the Consoler, into this precious oil.Make this oil a remedy for all who are anointed with it; heal them in body, in soul and in spirit, and deliver them in every affliction.”

As we celebrate the sacrament we ask that the sick be healed in body, mind and spirit. We trust that God alone knows the kind of healing that the sick needs most. We entrust the sick brother or sister to God.

Anointing of the Sick does not guarantee miracles of healing. What it does is to promise us sufficient grace to persevere in faith through the suffering. Through the celebration of the sacrament all come to know more deeply the mystery of God’s love and are reminded, once again, of who we are before God, beloved sons and daughters.

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is offered in our parish on the Second Saturday of each month at the 8:30 a.m. liturgy. The Sacrament will also be offered at the 7:15 a.m. and 10:45 a.m. Masses on Sunday, February 22.



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“The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health (*Mk 2:1-12*), has willed that His Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, His work of healing and salvation, even among her own members. This is the purpose of the two sacraments of healing: the sacrament of Penance and the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. “(*Catechism of the Catholic Church #1421*)

Who receives the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick?

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is meant to heal the whole person, spiritually and physically and at the same time reassure them of God’s love and mercy. Anyone who is seriously ill can be anointed. This includes the elderly who become weaker, even when no serious illness is present; those facing surgery for a serious condition or for exploration for a serious condition; those suffering from a mental illness; those suffering from the disease of alcoholism or other addictions; sick children, who have sufficient use of reason to be helped by the celebration; those who are unconscious or who have lost the use of reason, provided that they probably would have asked for the sacrament if they had the use of their faculties.

How is this sacrament celebrated?

The Church directs that this sacrament, as all sacraments, is to be celebrated within a community celebration, when possible. It recommends it be celebrated with family and members of the Christian community present to offer prayer and support.

When the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick takes place within the Mass, the Mass begins as usual. After the homily, those who are to receive the sacrament will be asked to stand, if possible. Those with them and those around them will be invited to place their hands on their shoulders, back or head as a sign of support for them. Prayers are then offered for those who will be anointed and for those who care for them.

The priest then approaches those seeking anointing and lays hands on their head calling to mind Jesus' way of healing: *"At sunset, all who had people sick with various diseases brought them to him. He laid hands on each of them and cured them"* (Luke 4:40). He then makes the Sign of the Cross on the person's forehead, with the Oil of the Sick, which is blessed each year by the Bishop at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week, saying: *"Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit."* To which all respond: *"Amen."* Then the priest anoints the palms of the sick one's hands with the Sign of the Cross saying: *"May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up."* Again, all respond: *"Amen."* After all have been anointed there is a concluding prayer and the Mass continues with the Preparation of the Gifts.

Sacraments are acts of faith. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick heals us through faith. In the light of faith, we believe that this sacrament offers a different kind of healing than chemicals, medicine or surgery can offer. It offers grace for the whole person, healing of body, mind and spirit. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that it conveys several graces and imparts gifts of strengthening in the Holy Spirit against anxiety, discouragement, and temptation, and conveys peace and fortitude (CCC1520). The prayers for the blessing of the oil that is used during the celebration of the sacrament seek God to *"send the power of Your Holy Spirit, the Consoler, into this precious oil... Make this oil a remedy for all who are anointed with it; heal them in body, in soul and in spirit, and deliver them in every affliction."*

Next week (February 22, 2009), the Gospel (Mark 2:1-12) tells how members of the community brought a man who was ill to Jesus. We ask you to consider doing the same. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick will be offered during the 7:15 a.m. and 10:45 p.m. Masses. If you know someone in need of this sacrament, please invite them to come to one of these liturgies. Please come with them to support them and pray for them and to allow God to grace them with healing and peace.



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