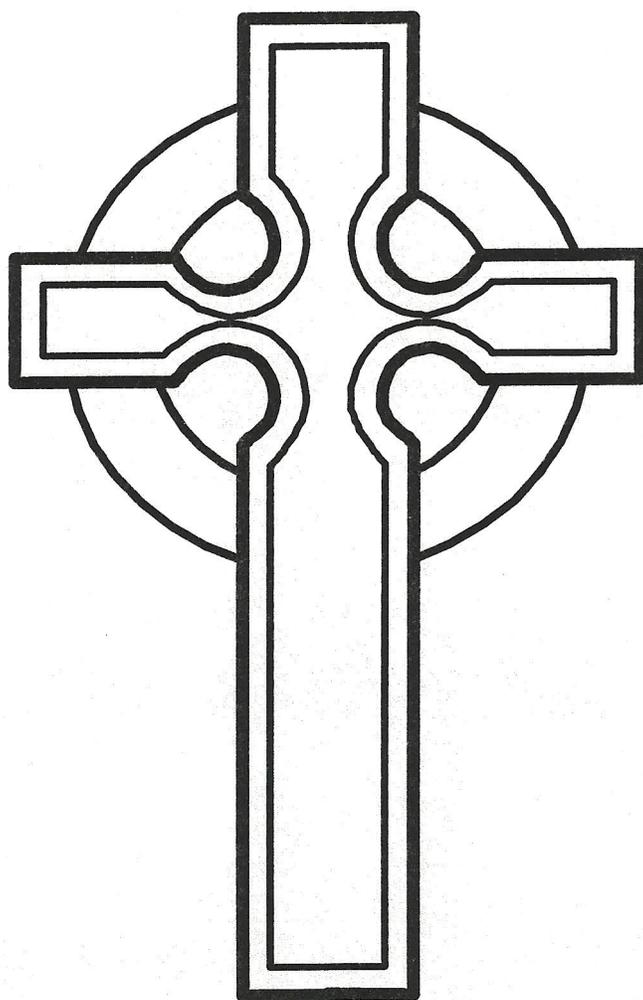


Anointing of the Sick



Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

"Are there any who are sick among you? Let them send for the presbyters (priests) of the Church, and let the presbyters pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick persons, and the Lord will raise them up; and if they have committed any sins, their sins will be forgiven them." (*James 5: 14-15*).

Anointing of the Sick in the Plan of Salvation

Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, human beings experience powerlessness, limitations, and finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1500*)

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is understood as one of the healing sacraments of the Church. It is Christ himself who touches those who are ill and offers them comfort and healing.

Are we healed in the Sacrament of Anointing?

Yes, all people are healed in the sacrament of Anointing. Suffering can be an instrument of conversion. While some people become despondent and aggressive in suffering, others become more aware of their mortality and turn to God in their need. Some people have looked at suffering as punishment from God. However, the Christian perspective on suffering is one of accepting suffering as a part of life. No one escapes suffering. Each in our own way suffers and is in need of healing. When we are anointed, we are touched with the hand of Christ and are comforted by the touch of God. The sacrament does not remove suffering, but it does comfort us by the gentle embrace of Christ. Moreover, in the sacrament of Anointing those who suffer are united to the very suffering and passion of Christ.

Cure or Healing?

An area of confusion has been the purpose of the sacrament of anointing. In our age of elaborate medical procedures and technology, we can fail to understand that the sacrament is not about seeking a cure but seeking healing. The grace of the sacrament offers the presence of Christ for the sick, the strength to endure suffering, and union of the sick with Christ's passion. Moreover, the sacrament touches the need for healing. This healing is not limited to mere physical healing but healing of the whole person, body, mind and spirit. Often it is not only physical suffering that the sick must endure but also spiritual desolation. Therefore the sacrament of Anointing provides the gentle and healing touch of Christ to all those who suffer.

Christ the Healer

Christ's compassion for the sick is evident throughout the scriptures. The focus of His healing is on the whole person - body, mind, and spirit. However, Christ's love for the sick is not demonstrated at a safe distance, but He identifies himself with the sick.

"When I was sick you visited me." Therefore, it is at the heart of the mission of the Church to reach out and to comfort the sick. The Christian visits the sick in order to serve and comfort the suffering Christ.

Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but He makes their miseries his own: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." But He did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing - the victory of sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ took upon Himself the whole weight of evil and took away the "sin of the world," of which illness is only a consequence. By His passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering; it can henceforth configure us to Him and unite us with His redemptive Passion. (CCC 1505)

"Heal the Sick!" The Church has received this charge from the Lord and strives to carry it out by taking care of the sick as well as by accompanying them with her prayer of intercession. She believes in the life-giving presence of Christ, the physician of the souls and bodies. This presence is particularly active through the sacraments, and in an altogether special way through the Eucharist, the bread that gives eternal life and that St. Paul suggests is connected with bodily health. (CCC 1509)

A Sacrament of the Sick

From ancient times in the liturgical traditions of both the East and West, we have testimonies to the practice of anointing of the sick with blessed oil (CCC 1512). The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is given to those who are seriously ill by anointing them on the forehead and hands with duly blessed oil - pressed from olives or from other plants - saying, only once, "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in His love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up." (CCC 1513)

Who receives this Sacrament?

The Anointing of the Sick "is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as anyone of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for them to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived." (CCC 1514) Moreover, it is fitting to receive the Anointing of the Sick just prior to a serious operation. The same holds for the elderly whose frailty becomes more pronounced. (CCC 1515)

Pastoral consideration: Sadly, one of the most common misunderstandings of this sacrament is that it is reserved for those quickly approaching death. This simply is not true; this is not a sacrament of the dying but a sacrament of the sick. Many of the faithful often wait too long before requesting the sacrament. The sacrament should be

requested at the very onset of serious illness not at the time of death. Also, if one has been anointed in the last six months for the same illness the sacrament need not be repeated. Moreover, the sacraments are for the living and a dead person should not be anointed.

If you or a loved one is in the hospital, please contact the chaplain in the pastoral care department to request the celebration of the sacraments.

Who presides at this Sacrament?

Only priests (bishops and presbyters) are ministers of the Anointing of the Sick. The faithful should encourage the sick to call for a priest to receive this sacrament. The sick should prepare themselves to receive it with good disposition, assisted by their pastor and the whole ecclesial community, which is invited to surround the sick in a special way through their prayers and fraternal attentions. *(CCC 1516)*

How is the Sacrament Celebrated?

Like all the sacraments, the Anointing of the Sick is a liturgical and communal celebration, whether it takes place in the family home, a hospital, or church, for a single sick person or a whole group of sick persons. It is very fitting to celebrate it with the Eucharist, the memorial of the Lord's Passover.

In order to highlight the communal aspect of the sacrament we request that you invite your family and friends to join us in the event that the sacrament is celebrated in the home, nursing center, or hospital. It is very fitting that the community is gathered in celebration of the sacraments.

Moreover, if you or a loved one is scheduled for surgery we invite you to contact the parish office and request the Sacrament of Anointing at a Eucharist liturgy. If at all possible, we invite you to receive the sacrament at one of the Sunday liturgies so that the entire community can support and pray for you. To schedule a time to be anointed please contact Father Timothy in the parish office at 687-9345.

We have designated one liturgy a month for the Sacrament of Anointing in the context of Eucharist. Please invite your local communities, family, and friends to these celebrations. To find the time and date of the next one, check the Sunday bulletin or call the office at 687-9345.

The Graces of the Sacrament

The special grace of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick has as its effects:

- The uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his or her own good and that of the whole Church;
- The strengthening, peace, and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age;
- The forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the Sacrament of Penance;

- The restoration of health, if it is conducive of the salvation of his or her soul;
- The preparation for passing over to eternal life.

What is Last Rites?

A significant area of confusion for Catholics is 'what is Last Rites' or what last rites really means. Hollywood has misrepresented our faith tradition in this area. The sacrament is often portrayed with a dying person in bed as a priest arrives just in the nick of time to anoint the dying person. Though this provides good material for movies, it does not paint an accurate or theologically sound understanding of the sacrament. Moreover, before Vatican II, the Sacrament of Anointing was referred to as Extreme Unction. In other words, it was only celebrated in extreme circumstances, i.e. the time of death. Sadly, the result was that many Catholics became fearful of the sacrament and avoided it until the last minutes of life. This is no longer the case since a contemporary understanding of the Sacrament of Anointing focuses on healing not death. Please do not wait to request the sacrament of the sick, rather request the celebration of the sacrament at the very beginning of an illness. If at all possible it should be celebrated at the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Viaticum, The Last Sacrament of the Christian

The "last rites" or last sacrament of the Christian is viaticum. Viaticum means bread for the journey. Viaticum does not require a priest. A deacon, Eucharistic minister, family member or trained layperson can celebrate viaticum with a dying person.

The Church offers those who are about to leave this life the Eucharist as viaticum. Communion in the body and blood of Christ received at this moment of "passing over" to the Father, has a particular significance and importance. It is the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection, according to the words of the Lord: "He or she who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him or her up at the last day." The sacrament of Christ once dead now risen, the Eucharist is here the sacrament of passing over from death to life, from this world to the Father. (CCC 1524).

Prayers for the Dead

Contained in the official rites of the Pastoral Care of the Sick of the Church are special prayers for the faithful departed. It is important to understand that the sacraments are for the living; therefore, the sacraments are not celebrated after death. However, the dead are assisted by our prayers and the faithful are encouraged to pray for those who have died and for God's comfort and consolation for themselves. There are official prayers of the dead. A deacon, chaplain, layperson, or family member may lead the prayers of the dead. (Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum p. 221)