

Anointing of the Sick

“Is any 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

Sacred Oil in the Old Testament

- Since Old Testament times, oil has been a symbol of:
 - the overflow of the Holy Spirit upon an individual (1 Sam 10:1-13, 16:12-13)
 - abundance of joy (Deut 11:14; Ps 23:5, 104:14-15, 133:1-2; Isa 61:3; Heb 1:9)
 - a sign of healing, for “it makes radiant with beauty, health and strength” (CCC 1293, Lk 10:34)
- Athletes in the ancient world made use of oil to limber up and cleanse themselves. Oil symbolizes health and soundness.

Christ the Physician

- “Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death. Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him” -CCC

1500-1501

Christ the Physician

- The healing of the sick was a messianic symbol of the coming of the Messiah, a sign that “God has visited his people” (Luke 7:16).
- In their suffering, Christ identifies himself with the sick (“I was sick and you visited me.” Mt 25:36) and took special compassion on the sick; the New Testament is replete with examples of Christ’s healings of sick persons.

Christ the Physician

- The healing of the body is not the ultimate end, but the healing of the soul.
- In Scripture, sickness of the body typically symbolizes the sickness of sin; consequently, the healings of Christ are meant ultimately to heal the soul primarily, and the body secondarily.
 - This does not mean that sickness is always a consequence of sin
 - For example, the healing of the blind, the deaf/mute, the crippled, the leprous, the dead. There is a spiritual significance to these healings as well as physical

Christ the Physician

- The healings of Jesus were signs of the coming Kingdom, where there will be a more radical healing, for in the Kingdom of Heaven “God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).
 - The healings of Christ therefore serve as signs of the life to come.

Healing in the New Testament & Church History

- This sacrament is known by a few names:
 - Extreme Unction
 - “Last Rites”
 - Anointing of the Sick
- To further his messianic mission, Christ extended his healing power to the Apostles (and to the Church) to bring his healing concern to all people of all time
 - Mark 6:13 records that “they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.”
 - It also reflects Christ’s closeness to the sick and those near death

Healing in the New Testament & Church History

- Nota bene: The "Last Rites" typically includes the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, together with Confession and Communion (if possible) and other prayers
- But the Anointing may be administered in other circumstances, outside the immediate danger of death
- In other words, just because you are anointed does not (necessarily) mean you are going to die.

Form and Matter

- The matter of the sacrament is the consecrated Oil of the Sick and the act of anointing.
 - The Oil of the Sick (and other oils) is consecrated by the Bishop at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week and distributed to the parishes for use during the following year.
- Administering this sacrament involves physically anointing the head (and hands) of the sick person, though other body parts may also be anointed.
- The form of the sacrament is the words “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.”

Proper Minister

- The proper minister of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is a priest or bishop.
- By longstanding apostolic tradition going back at least to Pope Innocent I (401-417) and beyond him to the instructions found in James 5:14-15, a priest or bishop is the proper minister;
 - Deacons and lay persons are unable to administer it.
- Beware of other 'anointings'

Effects of the Sacrament

- A particular gift of the Holy Spirit - The first grace of this sacrament is one of strengthening, peace and courage to overcome the difficulties that go with the condition of serious illness or the frailty of old age. (CCC 1520)
- Union with the passion of Christ - By the grace of this sacrament the sick person receives the strength and the gift of uniting himself more closely to Christ's Passion:
 - in a certain way the sick person is consecrated to bear fruit for the good of the Church by embracing a share in the Savior's redemptive suffering. (CCC 1521)

Absolution of Sin

- James 5: “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.”
 - If Sacramental confession is not possible, the Anointing of the Sick effects the forgiveness of sins
 - This absolution consists in a remission of sin and as much of the temporal punishment due to sin as corresponds to the intensity of charity and penance in the recipient.
 - It is a great grace of Christ to cleanse the soul of sin before death through this sacrament and prepare it for heaven
 - It is a grace we sometimes call the grace of a ‘happy death’

Absolution of Sin

- If the recipient is on the verge of death, then the sacrament of anointing is often coupled with the sacrament of penance (last confession) followed by Viaticum (final Holy Communion).
- It is among the most grace-filled moments of one's life to receive the Last Rites and brings great spiritual consolation to the person and his family

Who can receive?

- Those who are seriously ill or “in danger of death”
 - This can include those who are aged or in generally frail health
- Before surgery
- The time to receive the Sacrament is before death
 - not after!
- Don't wait until the last possible moment
- Every parish has an emergency line for those needing the Last Rites
- It should not be given for ‘general’ reasons or because you stubbed your toe or are having a bad day, etc.