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The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

During the month of February in the gospel readings it is noted that the subject matter centers on Jesus' healing of the sick. There will be a series of articles in the bulletin for the month of February dealing with the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The following information is from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition.



The Church believes and confesses that among the seven sacraments there is one especially intended to strengthen those who are being tried by illness - the Anointing of the Sick. "This sacred anointing of the sick was instituted, by Christ our Lord as a true and proper sacrament of the New Testament. It is alluded to by Mark, but is recommended to the faithful and promulgated by James the apostle and brother of the Lord." (Council of Trent (1551) 1695-1696: 1716-1717)

From ancient times, in the liturgical traditions of both East and West, we have testimonies to the practice of anointing of the sick with blessed oil. 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."

The Apostolic Constitution *Sacrum unctionem informorum*, following the Second Vatican Council, established that in the Roman Rite the following be observed:

The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is given to those who are seriously ill by anointing them on the forehead and hands with blessed oil-pressed from olives or from other plants-saying, "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."

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 him to receive this sacrament has certainly arrived."

If a sick person who received this anointing recovers his health, he can in the case of another grave illness receive this sacrament again. If during the same illness the person's condition becomes more serious, the sacrament may be repeated. It is fitting to receive the Anointing of the Sick just prior to a serious operation.

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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 fitting to celebrate it within the Eucharist. If circumstances suggest it, the celebration of the sacrament can be preceded by the sacrament of Penance and followed by the sacrament of the Eucharist. As the sacrament of Christ's Passover the Eucharist should always be the last sacrament of the earthly journey, the "viaticum" for "passing over" to eternal life.

Word and sacrament are from an indivisible whole. The Liturgy of the Word, preceded by an act of repentance, opens the celebration. The words of Christ, the witness of the apostles, awaken the faith of the sick person and of the community to ask the Lord for the strength of His Spirit.

The celebration of the sacrament includes the following principal elements: the "priests of the Church" - in silence - lay hands on the sick; they pray over them in the faith of the Church - this is the epiclesis proper to this sacrament; they then anoint them with oil blessed by the bishop.

These liturgical actions indicate what grace this sacrament confers upon the sick.

Barbara J. Wasser

The Effects of the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

This is the second of the articles in the bulletin discussing the above sacrament. The following information is from the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**, Second Edition.

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. This grace is *a gift of the Holy Spirit*, who renews trust and faith in God and strengthens against the temptations of evil, the temptation to discouragement and anguish in the face of death. This assistance from the Lord by the power of his Spirit is meant to lead the sick person to healing of the soul, but also of the body if it is God's will. Furthermore, if a person has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

The sick person, by the grace of this sacrament receives strength and the gift of *uniting himself more closely to Christ's Passion*. (As Father Mark stated in his homily last week-end, he gives the gift of a small crucifix to the sick that are suffering so they may be united with Christ's passion in their suffering.)

An ecclesial grace is received by the sick who receives this sacrament, by freely uniting themselves to the passion and death of Christ.

This sacrament is *preparation for the final journey*. If the sacrament of anointing of the sick is given to all who suffer from serious illness and infirmity, it is also given to those at the point of departing this life and is called *sacramentum exeuntium* (the sacrament of those departing). The Anointing of the Sick completes our conformity to the death and Resurrection of Christ, just as Baptism began it. It completes the holy anointing that marks the whole Christian life: that of Baptism which sealed the new life in us and that of Confirmation which strengthened us for the trials of this life. This last anointing fortifies the end of our earthly life for the final struggles before entering the Father's home.

In addition to the Anointing of the Sick, the Church offers those who are about to leave this life the Eucharist as *Viaticum*. Communion received at this moment of passing over to the Father has particular significance. It is the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection, according to the words of the Lord: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" John 6:54. The Eucharist is the sacrament of passing over from death to life, from this world to the Father.

As the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist form a unity called the sacraments of Christian initiation, so too it can be said that Penance, the Anointing of the Sick and the Eucharist as Viaticum constitute the completion of our earthly pilgrimage.

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The following scripture ties all of the above together beautifully:

Romans 8:13-23 - "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, that we should live according to the flesh, for if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live. For whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Now you have not received a spirit of bondage so as to be again in fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by virtue of which we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself gives testimony to our spirit that we are sons of God. But if we are sons, we are heirs also: heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ, provided, however, we suffer with him that we may also be glorified with him. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us. For the eager longing of creation awaits the revelation of the sons of God. For creation was made subject to vanity - not by its own will but by reason of him who made it subject - in hope, because creation itself also will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God. For we know that all creation groans and travails in pain until now. And not only it, but we ourselves also who have the first-fruits of the Spirit - we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."