

## *Celebrating the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*



The sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is the most misunderstood and misused of all the sacraments. Many Catholics look at it as a last-minute fix in a desperate situation. The sacrament is not a pill or medical treatment and one should not wait to seek its powerful healing graces.

### *What is a sacrament?*

- A sacrament is an outward sign established by Jesus Christ to confer inward grace.
- It is a rite that is performed to convey God's grace to the recipient through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sacraments provide an encounter with God, through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. They increase our faith and exercise our faith both for our own journey and to build up the body of Christ.

The anointing is one of the seven sacraments. It was practiced by the early Christians and officially recognized around 250 A.D. as part of the life of the Church. It should receive the same respect and reverence as the other sacraments. If the sacrament is understood and properly utilized, the transformative power of God's healing is endless.

### *What is the Anointing of the Sick?*

The Anointing of the Sick was formerly called Extreme Unction, and was primarily used as the "last rite" for the dying. Since Vatican II, it was revised to address sick persons and their sufferings, when they face serious illnesses or danger of death from old

age. It is meant to be employed early in people's illnesses so that they may become well in body, mind and spirit, and feel strengthened to endure suffering. It also encourages hope so that they may return to wholeness in the community.

### *Who should receive the sacrament?*

- A person of faith who is facing a serious illness (due to injury or disease) and is therefore in danger of death.
- A person of faith who is facing major surgery (or general anesthesia for any procedure).
- A child beyond the age of reason (7) who is seriously ill (because of injury or disease) or who is facing major surgery.
- The elderly who are weakened in their condition due to old age.

### *What does the rite of anointing look like?*

The rite is a beautiful and special encounter with God, who hears the cries of the sick person in pain, suffering, hopelessness, fear and isolation.

The rite is organized by three main actions: the prayer of the faithful, laying on of hands and anointing with oil. If celebrated as a communal anointing, the liturgy incorporates these actions into an experience of song, prayer, ritual and silence for the sick person and the assembly.

The anointing can also be celebrated with a Mass, in a home and in a hospital as well as other settings. The

ritual of the rite may be abbreviated to tend to the sick person's particular situation.

The meaning of each action is full of rich biblical foundation and the tradition of the

Church as the rite was

handed down through the ages to continue Christ's healing mission.



## *Prayer of Faith*

- A prayer of faith is the foundation of the outward expression of the laying on of hands and anointing with oil.
- A prayer of faith is one that expresses trust in God and flows from commitment to him.
- A prayer of faith is expressed not only by the individual in need of healing but also through the Spirit-filled efficacious prayer of the community.
- “It is in the action of God who blesses and in our subsequent reaction of recognition and action that the sacrament occurs” (Larson-Miller, 2005, p. 28).

## *Laying on of Hands*

- The laying on of hands is the gesture of the priest who represents the community, praying with authority over the sick person.
- The gesture indicates that this person is the subject of the Church’s prayer of faith and a sign of blessing.
- It is also an invocation praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the sick person.
- The gesture is accompanied with silence because silence heightens the importance of the action as it grabs our attention.

## *Anointing with Oil*

- The practice of anointing with oil signifies healing, strength and the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- The oil is a sacramental sign of the presence, power and grace of the Holy Spirit, and is used generously on the forehead and palms of the hand.
- The application of the Oil of the Sick (oil blessed specifically for this sacrament) in the name of the Lord and in the context of the prayer of faith effects this healing.

Participation in the rite and understanding God’s healing power brings healing and wholeness through

the sacrament. The first effect is **healing**, which may be physical, spiritual, psychological, moral social or all of the above. The emphasis is on **restoring relationships** through spiritual healing. The second effect is **strengthening** of the mind, body and spirit. The third effect is the **forgiveness of sins**, specifically the sins that may have contributed to the disorder and sins that may have arisen as a result of illness. The fourth effect is the **preparation** for eternal life. All sickness offers a glimpse of mortality but the sacrament offers a glimpse of immortality and the reality of the resurrection. The final effect is the conjoining of the sick person’s sufferings to the **sufferings of Christ**, so that the sick person can share an intimate connection with the crucified and risen Lord. The sick person may be converted and transformed by the sickness and faith in action. Then he or she becomes a witness to others of the mystery of Christ.

***Those who are seriously ill need the help of God’s grace. Through the sacrament of anointing, Christ strengthens the faithful who are afflicted by illness, providing them with the strongest means of support (PCS, 1983, para.5).***

*If you or a loved one is in need of the Anointing of the Sick,*

*Please contact the parish office at 559-638-2012.*

### **Works Cited**

International Committee on English in the Liturgy; Catholic Church. (1983). *Pastoral care of the sick: Rites of anointing and viaticum*. New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp.

Larson-Miller. (2005). *Lex orandi series: the sacrament of the anointing of the sick*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.

Prepared by Sally Flores, RN, IP, BSN, CHPN, MAPM for the Faith Community of the Diocese of Fresno