

Please call the rectory and / or let Fr. know after Mass if you or someone you know is ill or homebound and desires to receive Reconciliation, Eucharist, and/ or Anointing of the Sick. (**James 5:14** - "Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and *they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil* in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven").

Emergencies call any time.

Rectory Office: (860) 871-1970, M-F 9 a.m. - 12 noon.

CHRIST'S COMPASSION FOR THE SICK

Chris(s) compassion toward the sick and his healings of almost every kind of infirmity are a resplendent sign that "God has visited his people."

- CCC, no. 1503, citing Lk 7:16

Jesus came to heal the whole person, body and soul. Mark's Gospel, chapter 2:1-12, relates the following event that illustrates this teaching. Jesus was in a house in Capernaum teaching an overflow crowd. The house was probably a stone dwelling whose walls were coated with plaster. The rooms surrounded an inner courtyard. A roof of reeds and sticks packed with thick clay would have kept out the rain. Opening a hole in the roof would have been relatively easy. Since they could not enter by the door because of the crowd, four men, carrying a paralytic, climbed the stairway that led to the roof. They opened a hole in it and lowered their friend into the area where Jesus was preaching.

Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "Your sins are forgiven" (Mk 2:5). Scripture makes no comment on the man's reaction. But into that spiritual moment a discordant note emerged. Some religious scholars in the group complained inwardly that Jesus was blasphemous because, according to them, only God could forgive sins. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, challenged them: "Which is easier to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, pick up your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth"-he said to the paralytic, "I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home" (Mk 2:9-11). The man rose and went home. The people glorified God for Christ's healing of soul and body.

The Gospels narrate many other occasions when Jesus healed the sick. While Jesus sometimes simply spoke some words to accomplish a healing, he often touched the afflicted person to bring about the cure. In the Church's Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, through the ministry of the priest, it is Jesus who touches the sick to heal them from sin-and sometimes even from physical ailment. His cures were signs of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. The core message of his healings tells us of his plan to conquer sin and death by his dying and rising.

On the Cross, Jesus bore the full weight of evil and removed its power over us. He provided a new meaning for suffering by giving it redemptive power. By his grace we are able to unite our pain to his redemptive passion. St. Paul witnessed this when he wrote, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, that is, the church" (Col1:24).

THE CHURCH CONTINUES CHRIST'S MINISTRY OF HEALING

The Church carries forward Christ's healing ministry in a variety of approaches. Catholic families in countless ways care for family members who are ill. There are numerous inspiring stories of an aging spouse who personally ministers to an ailing spouse in cases of Alzheimer's and other illnesses. Caregivers find that faith and prayer mean a great deal to them in these situations.

A multitude of religious orders and congregations have established Catholic hospitals to take care of the physical and spiritual needs of the sick. Church-sponsored hospice care is another form of this ministry of healing. Besides the doctors, nurses, and chaplains, there are occasional instances of individuals with the charism (gift) of healing. "The Holy Spirit gives to some a special charism of healing, so as to make manifest the power of grace of the risen Lord" (CCC, no. 1508).

Millions of believers journey to shrines like the one at Lourdes, often in search of physical cures but always to experience a deepening of faith. The Church requires healing miracles as part of the canonization process, the procedure for declaring the sainthood of a given person.

Above all, the Church continues Christ's healing ministry in the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. St. James describes its celebration in apostolic times: "Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters [priests] of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven" (Jas 5:14-15).

A SACRAMENT OF HEALING

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 to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived. "

- CCC, no. 1514, citing SC, no. 73

The Rite of Anointing tells us there is no need to wait until a person is at the point of death to receive the Sacrament. A careful judgment about the serious nature of the illness is sufficient. The Sacrament may be repeated if the sick person recovers after the anointing but becomes ill once again, or if, during the same illness, the person's condition becomes more serious. A person should be anointed before surgery when a dangerous illness is the reason for the intervention (d. Rite of Anointing, Introduction, nos. 8-10).

Moreover, "old people may be anointed if they are in weak condition even though no dangerous illness is present. Sick children may be anointed if they have sufficient use of reason to be comforted by this sacrament. . . . [The faithful] should be encouraged to ask for the anointing, and, as soon as the time for the anointing comes, to receive it with faith and devotion, not misusing the sacrament by putting it off" (Rite of Anointing, nos. 11, 12, 13).

Only bishops and priests may be ministers of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. A penitential rite followed by the Liturgy of the Word opens the celebration. Scripture awakens the faith of the sick and family members and friends to pray to Christ for the strength of his Holy Spirit. The priest lays his hands on the head of the sick person. He then proceeds to anoint, with the blessed Oil of the Sick, the forehead and hands of the sick person (in the Roman Rite). He accompanies these acts with 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" (CCC, no. 1513).

For those who are about to depart from this life, the Church offers the person Penance, Anointing of the Sick, and the Eucharist as Viaticum (food for the journey) given at the end of life. These are "the sacraments that prepare for our heavenly homeland" (cf. CCC, no. 1525). These rites are highly valued by Catholics as powerful aids to a good death. Since Holy Communion is the effective sign of Christ's Paschal Mystery, it becomes for the recipient the opportunity to unite one's own suffering and dying to that of Christ with the hope of life eternal with him. The special words proper to Viaticum are added: "May the Lord Jesus protect you and lead you to everlasting life. Amen."

EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT

When the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is given, the hoped-for effect is that, if it be God's will, the person be physically healed of illness. But even if there is no physical healing, the primary effect of the Sacrament is a spiritual healing by which the sick person receives the Holy Spirit's gift of peace and courage to deal with the difficulties that accompany serious illness or the frailty of old age. The Holy Spirit renews our faith in God and helps us withstand the temptations of the Evil One to be discouraged and despairing in the face of suffering and death. Also, a sick person's sins are forgiven if he or she was not able to go to Confession prior to the celebration of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

Another effect of this Sacrament is union with the Passion of Christ. By uniting ourselves more closely with the sufferings of Our Lord, we receive the grace of sharing in the saving work of Christ. In this way, our suffering, joined to the Cross of Christ, contributes to building up the People of God.

This Sacrament also prepares us for our final journey when we depart from this life. The Anointing of the Sick completes our identification with Jesus Christ that was begun at our Baptism. Its grace and power fortify us in our final struggles before we go to the Father's house.

FROM THE CATECHISM

When should we receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick?

The proper time for receiving this holy anointing has certainly arrived when the believer begins to be in danger of death because of illness or old age. Each time a Christian falls seriously ill, he may receive the Anointing of the Sick, and also when, after he has received it, the illness

worsens. (CCC, nos. 1528, 1529)

Who are the ministers of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick?

Only priests... and bishops can give the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, using oil blessed by the bishop, or if necessary by the celebrating presbyter [priest or celebrant] himself. (CCC, no. 1530)

What are the effects of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick?

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 own good and that of the whole Church;

- [giving the sick person the strength], peace, and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age;

- [imparting] the forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of Penance;

- [providing for] the restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul;

- [helping the sick person in] the preparation for passing: over to eternal life. (CCC, no. 1532)

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SACRAMENT FOR THE COMMUNITY

For some, there is nothing more frustrating than being sick. Sickness runs from annoying inconvenience-like a headache or a common cold-to grave, life-threatening cases involving major surgery or incurable disease. In each case, sickness reminds us of our limitations.

Our reaction to infirmity is to seek alleviation. With a perfect understanding of the human person, Christ has provided the Church from its beginning with a spiritual as well as a corporeal remedy for our illness. We are not just flesh and bone. We are spirit, mind, and body.

In a very real sense, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick has a very important community dimension. In any illness, particularly one as we near the end of our lives, we should never have to stand alone. We should not have to face infirmity without the consolation of others. In the New Testament's Letter of St. James, the sick person is instructed to call for the presbyters (priests) of the Church for an anointing and prayers.

These presbyters represented the Christian community and its concern for the sick person. Such concern is further highlighted in the "prayer of faith" that St. James said will reclaim the one who is ill-the prayer arising from the community of faith, the Church, gathered around the sick person precisely to invoke the "name of the Lord."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that "the Anointing of the Sick is a liturgical and communal celebration, whether it takes place in a family home, a hospital or church, for a single sick person or a whole group of sick persons" (CCC, no. 1517).

Increasingly today, there is an effort to bring people together for a communal celebration of this Sacrament, usually in a parish church. Since infirmity and old age constitute legitimate reasons for receiving this Sacrament, a parish can easily provide a setting for a number of parishioners to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick regularly. It can serve the purpose of the Sacrament and, at the same time, build up the faith of the community itself.

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

- "Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters [priests] of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven" (Jas 5:14-15).

- The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is for those who are seriously ill or in danger of death or suffering the difficulties of old age. The Sacrament may be received each time the believer falls seriously ill or an illness worsens (ct. CCC, no. 1529).

- Only priests and bishops may administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. This is because one effect of this Sacrament can be the forgiveness of sin. They use Oil of the Sick blessed by the bishop or, in necessity, an oil blessed by the priest.

- The rite of the Anointing of the Sick includes the anointing of the forehead and hands of the sick or other parts of the body accompanied by the liturgical prayer that asks for the grace of the Sacrament.

- The gifts of this Sacrament include uniting the sick person with Christ's Passion, for the person's well-being and that of the Church; strength to endure patiently the sufferings of illness and old age; the forgiveness of sins if the person was unable to receive the Sacrament of Penance; and preparation for the passage to eternal life.