



Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

"Is there anyone sick among you? He should ask for the presbyters of the church. they in turn are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name of the Lord." James 5:14

Jesus came to show us the Way to the Father. During his time on earth Jesus cured many who were sick and forgave their sins. When Jesus knew his time to return to heaven was imminent He took the time to instruct his closest friends, the 12 apostles, to go out two by two. "They anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them." ~ (Mark 6:13)

Is this the same Sacrament as Extreme Unction?

Over the centuries this Sacrament was given more and more to those who were near the point of death. The anointing was accompanied by "Viaticum" (Eucharist) - food for the journey into eternal life. The faithful would wait till death was within hours and then call the priest to come and prepare the sick for their death.

The Second Vatican Council in its pastoral wisdom went back to the origins of the sacrament to explore what Jesus intended for this sacrament. As stated in the Gospel of Mark above, Jesus instructed his disciples to pray over and anoint those who were sick and they would be healed. Today in the spirit of Vatican II we urge all those who are elderly, seriously ill or preparing for surgery to ask for the Sacrament of The Anointing of the Sick.

Who can receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick?

"Our pastoral experience of the revised rite and the Church's desire for the wider availability of the sacrament has helped pastors realize that serious spiritual and mental illnesses are also opportunities to celebrate this sacrament." Father Thomas Richstatter Fr. Richstatter also cites examples of persons suffering from the diseases of alcoholism, and other addictions as well as mothers who suffer from post partum depression.

Sacraments are acts of faith that grace the whole person – body, soul and spirit. In the blessing of the oil of the sick we ask God to "send the power of your Holy Spirit, the Consoler into this precious oil... Make this oil a remedy for all who are anointed with it; heal them in body, in soul, in spirit, and deliver them from every affliction." (Pastoral Care of the Sick, 123)

This sacrament is a sacrament of the living, and so we encourage those who want to receive this sacrament not to wait until hours before death, but rather ask for the anointing when they can participate in the sacrament by including reconciliation within the rite as well as receiving the Eucharist.

Who can administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick?

“Only priests (bishops and presbyters) are ministers of the Anointing of the Sick.” (CCC, 1516) This is because reconciliation is a part of this rite. An Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist can bring Viaticum to the sick person and read the prayers of Commendation for the Dying if a priest is unavailable.

Can we anoint the dead?

This sacrament is meant for the living, however we can pray for the person who has just died. This is a good time to say the prayers of commendation if available. Otherwise a rosary is a beautiful way of praying for the soul’s journey to the next life.

How often can one receive this sacrament?

“If a sick person who received this anointing recovers their health, they 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. The same holds for the elderly whose frailty becomes more pronounced.” (CCC, 1515)

Where can this sacrament take place?

“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 within the Eucharist, the memorial of the Lord’s Passover.” (CCC, 1517)

How can we aid the family of the sick and dying?

Help the family to pray audibly with and for their loved one, inviting each person to make the sign of the Cross on the forehead. Let them know the value of touching the person by holding their hand or stroking them gently. Often the sick person knows they are dying and we can teach the family members to permit their loved one to go to God. The prayers of commendation for the dying contain thoughts that can comfort and assist both the dying person as well as those praying for them.

Prayer of Commendation

Go forth, Christian soul, from this world in the name of God the almighty Father, who created you, in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who suffered for you, in the name of the Holy Spirit, who was poured out upon you, go forth, faithful Christian.

May you live in peace this day, may your home be with God in Zion, with Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, with Joseph, and all the Angels and Saints.