

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

by Fr. Antony

The sacrament of “anointing the sick” is a rite that is performed to convey God’s healing grace to the sick through the power of the Holy Spirit. 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 scholars say this sacrament was called “Extreme Unction” because: ‘First, this anointing concluded the series of sacramental anointing during a person’s spiritual life — beginning at Baptism and followed by Confirmation and perhaps Holy Orders, and concluding with Extreme Unction. Second, this anointing more and more was used for those or at the point of death’. This sacrament complements the sacrament of Penance, conveying the forgiveness of sin.

During His public ministry, Jesus healed people — the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf and mute. His healing touched both body and soul. Our Lord entrusted His apostles to continue the healing ministry. He said “cure the sick, raise the dead, and cleanse the lepers...” (**Matt. 10: 8**). “They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them” (**Mk 6:13**).

In his letter, St. James the Apostle provides a very clear teaching regarding the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick: “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” (**Jas 5:14-15**). Now the healing ministry of our Lord, which He entrusted to his apostles, continues through His Church.

In 1551, the Council of Trent decreed that, “This sacred anointing of the sick was instituted by Christ our Lord as a true and proper sacrament of the New Testament... is recommended to the faithful and promulgated by James, the apostle and brother of the Lord”. In 1963, Vatican Council named it as “Anointing of the Sick “and said that it is not only for those who are at the point of death but also for those faithful who are in danger of death from sickness, or old age. Vatican II also recommends that, if a sick person who received this anointing recovers his health, he can in the case of another grave illness, receive this sacrament again. The faithful also can receive this sacrament just prior to a serious surgery. The same holds for the elderly whose frailty becomes more pronounced.

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is administered only by a bishop or a priest. The Catechism specifies, “Only priests (bishops and presbyters) are ministers of the Anointing of the Sick” (No. 1516). The Code of Canon Law likewise asserts, “Every priest, and only a priest, validly administers the Anointing of the Sick” (No. 1003). Because it not only brings healing to body, but also healing to the mind, that is, it provides the sick forgiveness of sins; the power to forgive sins is given to the Apostles and through them to their successors. This sacrament has a communitarian aspect, so it should be administered assisted by the pastor and

the whole ecclesial community, which is invited to surround the sick in a special way through their prayers and fraternal attention (**CCC- 1516**).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that 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. 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 (**CCC 1517**).

The celebration opens by a penitential service followed by the Word of God. The matter and the form of the sacrament is the following: the "priests of the Church" lay hands on the sick and pray over them in silence in the faith of the Church, and they then anoint them with oil blessed by the bishop, with these 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 1518-1519**).

This sacrament helps the sick person to unite himself to the passion of Christ, brings peace and courage to endure the sufferings of illness or old age, the forgiveness of sins, the restoration of health and the preparation for passing over to eternal life.