

**P**ossibly the least understood of the seven sacraments is the Anointing of the Sick. We may try not to pay attention to this vital sacrament because it reminds us too much of our mortality. But no one is guaranteed passage through life without facing serious illness, either their own or the illness of someone they know and love.

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick was instituted to help us on an important journey, whether it is a journey on the road to recovery or through the difficult period of a profound illness.

### *"God Is Healing"*

The name Jesus means God is our salvation, or God is healing. During Jesus' public ministry on earth, he continually showed his concern for the sick and distressed, healing them of their *physical, emotional and spiritual* infirmities.

Think of the physical healing of the lepers, the driving out of demons possessing a man living among the tombs, the forgiveness of a penitent woman who washes Jesus' feet with her tears. His healing power extended not only to the bodily infirm but also to those troubled by mental illness and spiritual anguish.

### *Founded in Scripture*

Jesus' miracles were usually accompanied by prayers and gestures. The Gospels often recount that Jesus looked up to heaven and then made a physical sign, such as taking the hand of the fevered. Thus, Jesus gave us the earliest form and substance – prayer and laying hands on the sick – of what we call today the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

There are many references in Scripture to the institution of the Sacrament. In James 5:14-15, we read, "Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint 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."

### *The Power of the Holy Spirit*

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick confers the power of the Holy Spirit upon the afflicted.

The Holy Spirit is our Consoler, and through the Anointing of the Sick, we ask God to send the Holy Spirit that he may impart his gifts to the suffering.

We pray that they may be strengthened as they confront their illness and receive courage to endure their suffering in a Christian spirit. We prayerfully ask that they find relief from anxiety and guard against the temptation to become discouraged and lose faith.

When people are sick, particularly if they are in the last stages of life, it is natural for them to look back over their lives and to sometimes feel regret, anger and abandonment. They may weaken in their faith and no longer believe that God will keep his word. Through the ritual of the Anointing of the Sick, we ask God to help the patient recover, if it be God's will, and for the fortitude to face the future with peace.

### *Who May Receive the Sacrament?*

The Anointing of the Sick is administered to the faithful whenever there is concern about the chance for recovery from an illness. This includes those who:

- are seriously ill
- face a life-threatening situation, such as before or after necessary surgery
- are chronically sick, such as diabetics and those with heart disease
- are seriously mentally ill or depressed
- begin to face death as a result of age.

Thus, it is possible for a member of the faithful to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick more than once. This may occur if someone has recovered and then fallen sick again, or if during the same illness, the person's condition worsens.

People may erroneously refrain from receiving the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick because they have been away from the Church. Like the Sacrament of Penance, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is a healing sacrament. It is intended to be a sign of our reconciliation with God. If someone has not been participating in the life of the Church, they may nevertheless ask to receive the Sacrament and in doing so, confess their sins to the priest and receive the Holy Eucharist.

### *The Rite of Anointing of the Sick*

The Anointing of the Sick can be administered *privately* at the bedside of the patient, (such as in a hospital, long-term care facility or at home), or in a *communal* form, such as in church. In either form, the priest will pray for the sick person and anoint him or her with holy oil.

The communal celebration of the Anointing of the Sick may take place in the context of a Mass, or it may be performed as a separate ritual. As during the Mass, the gathered are invited to participate in a

penitential rite. The penitential rite does not take the place of the Sacrament of Penance, however, and those who desire to confess their sins should arrange to receive the Sacrament of Penance privately.

During the Liturgy of Anointing, the sick are brought forward to be anointed. Those who are not ill and who are not accompanying a sick person to the altar should remain in their pews. They, too, join in the healing power of the Sacrament through "a ministry of mutual charity" by praying for the sick and by thanking God for the blessing of health.

If the Sacrament is administered outside of Mass, the Liturgy of Anointing may be followed by the Liturgy of Holy Communion.

### *What Will the Priest Think?*

People may be reluctant to call for a priest because of the condition of their homes. A serious illness becomes the dominant concern of a household. Personal grooming, laundry, cleaning and similar chores take a back seat to doctor visits, filling prescriptions and making the patient feel comfortable.

The priest, as God's representative on earth, does not judge housekeeping. It is Jesus who is eager to come into the home, and once invited, he is a most loving and understanding Guest.

# THE *LEAST* UNDERSTOOD SACRAMENT



CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE MARTYR  
CHURCH 250 E. 72ND STREET NEAR 2ND  
RECTORY 259 E. 71ST STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10021  
(212) 744-4880  
[www.saintjohnthemartyr.com](http://www.saintjohnthemartyr.com)