

Understanding the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

THE HEALING
SACRAMENT
OF THE LIVING



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*“Are any of you sick?
They should call
for the elders of the
Church and have
them pray over them, anointing
them with oil in the name of the
Lord. The prayer of faith will
save the sick, and the Lord will
raise them up; and anyone who
has committed sins will be
forgiven”.*

JAMES 5: 14-15

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THE HEALING SACRAMENT OF THE LIVING

The Role of the Roman Catholic Community

Jesus calls each of us to bring compassion and healing to those who are sick. The care of the sick is the responsibility of us all.

The one who is sick may feel alienated and isolated. Through the celebration of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, the Church expresses its love and asks God's help for those who are sick.

*“I have come that they may have life,
and have it more abundantly.”*

JOHN 10:10

Participation in the celebration of this sacrament offers those who are sick an opportunity to open themselves to the healing power of God's grace.

WHAT IS THE SACRAMENT OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK?

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is especially intended to strengthen those who are suffering serious illness. For a long time, this sacrament was celebrated only with people who were dying and for this reason came to be known as “last rites.” It was meant to give them strength to face death. But today, it is offered to support, encourage and comfort all those who are seriously ill. Participation in the celebration of this sacrament offers those who are sick an opportunity to open themselves to the healing power of God's grace and to continue to grow in wholeness.

In this sacrament, we meet Jesus who heals and consoles us by giving us the Holy Spirit. The Risen Lord comes to strengthen us in body, mind and spirit during our time of illness.

THE GRACES OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Those who are seriously ill may desire healing in many different ways. They may feel anguish and they may fear being abandoned by God. Prayer can become difficult. Those who are sick might feel forgotten or think that they have become a burden for others.

God's grace in this sacrament brings peace and courage to those who suffer serious illness or the frailty of old age. The power of the Holy Spirit, present in this sacrament, touches the whole person, not just the body or the soul. There is no magical result. The comfort and the release of stress, which the sacrament brings, help bring healing to both body and soul. Trust and faith in God are renewed and those who suffer are reminded of their dignity and worth.

HOW IS THIS SACRAMENT CELEBRATED?

Before the moment of anointing, the priest first lays hands in silence on the head of the person who is receiving the sacrament. Before doing this, the priest may invite those who are present to touch the sick person. The priest then anoints the forehead and hands of the sick person with blessed oil and offers a prayer of faith. Family members and other members of the Christian community should be encouraged to be present at the time of the celebration of the sacrament to offer their loving support.

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick may be celebrated in a person's parish church either on its own or as part of the Eucharist. In some parishes, this is done once a month or even weekly. However, it may also be celebrated in the home, a hospital or nursing home.

WHEN AND HOW OFTEN DOES ONE CELEBRATE THIS SACRAMENT?

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick should be celebrated at the beginning of a serious illness. It is very important that the one who is sick is able to hear and participate in the celebration.

If during the same illness the person's condition becomes more serious, the sacrament may be repeated. If a person who has been anointed recovers from sickness, that person may celebrate the sacrament again in the face of another grave illness.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and the Sacrament of the Eucharist, celebrated together, provide spiritual strength and nourishment for the passage from death to eternal life. Communion for the dying, called Viaticum, needs to be celebrated while the person is still conscious. That is why families should contact the priest before the final hours of death while a loved one is still able to participate. When a person is at the moment of death or has just died, the rite called “Commendation” is the Church's last rite for this person.

WHO SHOULD CELEBRATE THE SACRAMENT OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK?

Those who are elderly and whose frailty is becoming more pronounced.

Those adults and children who are suffering from a major illness, are facing surgery, serious medical tests or have suffered a serious accident.

Those who suffer from chronic illness such as arthritis or diabetes, or who suffer from a serious mental illness.

There is a need for those who are gravely ill to have expressed a desire, or by their lives to have demonstrated, that celebrating this sacrament would be important to them. It is not enough for family members or hospital staff to desire it on the sick person's behalf.

It is important to try to ensure that those who are sick and those around them understand the significance of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick as a sacrament of healing and are prepared to celebrate it well.



It is very important that the one who is sick be able to hear and participate in the celebration of this sacrament.





WAYS OF CARING FOR THE SICK

We often forget that what the suffering person needs most is someone who will listen. Nothing we can say or do is likely to be as helpful as simply listening. People who are seriously ill are experiencing powerful emotions and often need to tell others what they are going through.

At times, we will not know how to respond or what to say, and it is best not to say anything. There is a power and beauty in silence. It is like a message saying, "I am here with you and I am not going to leave". That message will be remembered long after the words are forgotten.

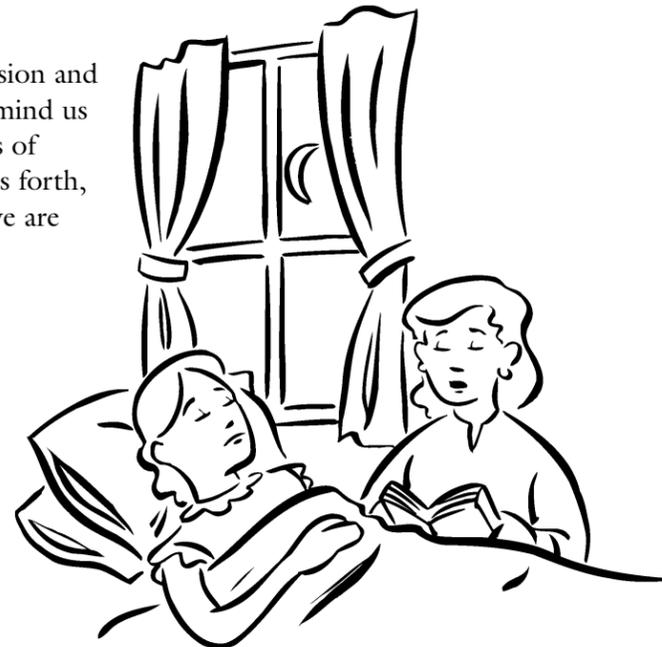
Another thing we can do for those in great suffering is to let them feel what they are feeling. Do not try to talk them out of their feelings. We must let them feel and express what they are feeling inside – the anger, the fear, the hurt, the sorrow and the guilt. It is healthy and wise to do so.

People who are facing the most severe of life's trials can be powerful teachers if we are willing to hear what they have to say.

THE GIFT OF THE SICK

Like all of us, those who are sick, elderly or dying are always attempting to turn toward God. Even in crisis moments, grace makes growth possible. We are always given the opportunity to offer and to receive forgiveness. By turning in faith to be anointed by the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, those who are sick and elderly reveal God's desire to bring wholeness and healing love to all who are broken and alienated by suffering.

Those who are in need of our compassion and care reveal God's presence to us. They remind us of what is truly important in life. The acts of loving service, which their great need calls forth, transform us. As we draw near to them we are blessed with the life of the Spirit.



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A FEW REMINDERS

As soon as you or a loved one become ill or become aware that you are in need of surgery or some other serious medical procedure, you should receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

You or a loved one should contact your parish office:

To arrange to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick before you go into the hospital.

To make arrangements to receive communion in the hospital and after you have returned home.

To ask that your name be put on the list of those prayed for at Mass.

Ask someone to gather family and friends to join with you in faith and to pray as the sacrament is being celebrated.

Identify two or three people you would specifically like to pray for you while you are in the hospital and contact them with your request.

Select a religious article you might want to take with you into the hospital that would be a reminder of your faith and a comfort to you (This might include such things as a rosary, a medal, a religious statue, a bible, a favourite prayer book etc.)

State that you are Roman Catholic upon admission to the hospital and that you wish to have the Roman Catholic Chaplain visit you.