

SACRAMENT OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK

The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily life¹, has willed that His Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, His work of healing and salvation even among her own members.²

“Is any one of 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.”³

1. In our segmentation of the seven Sacraments, the Anointing of the Sick is the second of the Sacraments of Healing; the prior one being the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Consider a person seriously ill; what would be his/her wishes? Would it be for a cure, a lessening of pain, encouragement to endure, prayers for physical and spiritual support from family and the community of the Church for relief? Or, a person who may be at the point of death; what would be his/her thoughts? Fear of death, sorrow to leave family and friends, desire for forgiveness of sin in preparation of transition from this life into the presence of the Almighty, desire for the reception of grace to accept the will of God?
2. Through the reception of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, all these concerns and anxieties are quelled and defeated by the working of the Holy Spirit in the imparting of His grace upon the properly disposed. Christ identifies Himself with the sick through His compassion, love, and His many healings. This compassion and love is the basis for the institution of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.
3. The Anointing of the Sick is not a Sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. From the 12th century until the Second Vatican Council in the mid 1960's, this Sacrament was termed as “Extreme Unction” or “Last Rites” and was reserved exclusively to those who were in imminent danger of death. The Council brought about not only a new name, but also a closer understanding to that of the early Church and the mission of Jesus. The solace and the healing graces of the ritual anointing were therefore often lost to the ill person or put off until it was too late for the full effect of the Sacrament.
4. This sacrament can be administered to any baptized person whose health is impaired due to illness or old age. Even children who are ill can be anointed if they are capable of understanding the meaning of the sacrament. The sacrament can be administered as often as the illness continues or recur. It is also fitting to receive the Anointing of the Sick prior to serious surgery.

Spiritual Effects

5. “The first grace of the Sacrament is one of strengthening, peace and courage to overcome

¹ Matt. 2:1-12

² Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 396, para. 1421) Print.

³ James 5:14-15

the difficulties that go with the condition of serious illness or the frailty of old age. This grace is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who renews trust and faith in God and strengthens against the temptation of discouragement and anguish in the face of death. It is meant to lead the sick person to not only the healing of soul but also the healing of the body if such is God's will.⁴

Suffering, which is a consequence of original sin, acquires a new meaning; it becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus.⁵

The Church offers the Eucharist as Viaticum to those who are about to leave this life, in conjunction with this Sacrament. The Eucharist received at this moment of "passing over" to the Father has a particular significance and importance. It is the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection.⁶

Other Effects

6. The Sacrament channels God's healing graces to comfort and strengthen the faith of the person who is ill. It can help a person to endure suffering and, if it be God's will, to bring a cure of that illness. In addition to the spiritual effects, the Anointing of the Sick has a positive psychological effect that in itself may even enhance the body into physical cure.
7. Only Priests and Bishops may administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The Anointing consists essentially in the anointing of the forehead and palm of the hands of the sick person, accompanied by the liturgical prayer of the celebrant asking for special grace of the Sacrament.⁷
8. Satan's great spheres of operation are sin, sickness and death. The victory of Christ over all three is made present for us personally in the Sacraments, and this is particularly so in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Every absolution from sin, every anointing, is Christ Himself coming into the realm of Satan to break his hold. It is the presence of the victory of Christ into the world.

⁴ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 423, para. 1520) Print.

⁵ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 423, para. 1521) Print.

⁶ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 424, para. 1524) Print.

⁷ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 425, para. 1531-1532) Print.