

***ANOINTING OF THE SICK at ALL
ST. THOMAS AQUINAS MASSES
FEBRUARY 9TH & 10TH.***

***Please bring the sick and frail to this
community celebration during all of
our regularly scheduled parish
weekend Masses next week.***



For Our Healing:

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

by Woodene Koenig-Bricker

Wrong affirmations about the sacrament of healing;

"It's just for old people."

"You can only receive it if you're really sick with something like cancer."

"You get it right before you die."

If you, like these teens, think the Anointing of the Sick is just for the extremely old or the critically ill, or if you assume the only time you can receive it is at the moment of death, you aren't alone. Most Catholics still think of the sacrament that way. While it's true the Anointing of the Sick is one of the ways the Church helps prepare us for death, it's much more than that. It's a celebration of Jesus' promise that we will have life and have it abundantly. *It's the sign of Christ's healing presence in the world. And it's not just for the elderly.*

Anyone, regardless of age, can receive the sacrament if his or her health is seriously impaired. It can also be administered before surgery and, contrary to many people's belief, it can be received more than once if the original illness gets worse or if another serious sickness is diagnosed.

What's Going On in the Sacrament?

In the letter of James in the Bible, he writes, "Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters [those who have authority] 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" (5:14-15).

The words St. James wrote are still true today. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is our way of continuing the healing work Jesus began 2,000 years ago.

While we can say with confidence that healing always occurs during the Anointing of the Sick, it isn't always the kind of healing we might expect.

Even after we've been anointed, God may allow us to continue to be physically ill, but he also gives us his word that healing will take place on one level or another. While we often assume getting physically well is the best thing for us, God may know we need to come to a greater awareness of the divine and may choose to heal some area of our spirit or emotions instead of our body.

The Rite of Anointing

Despite its potential for drama, the Anointing of the Sick may be the most low-key of all the sacraments. The first time I saw an anointing, I was surprised at how short and unexciting the ceremony was. All the priest did was say a few prayers and read a Scripture passage. Then he placed his hands on the person's head and prayed silently. Finally, he took out some holy oil and rubbed a little on the person's forehead and palms. The whole event took less than 10 minutes.

Those two elements—prayer and anointing with oil—are the essence of the sacrament, the parts that must be performed for it to be valid. The priest may distribute Communion to the person being anointed and anyone else who wants to receive. Finally, he may merely end the service with a simple prayer and blessing.



Jesus, the Healer

The Anointing of the Sick is a sacrament which certainly mirrors the actions of Jesus when he walked the earth, spending much of his time healing the sick. In fact, most of his miracles involved curing some kind of illness. From the beginning of his ministry, his reputation as a healer spread rapidly. In his Gospel, Luke tells us about some people who were so anxious to have Jesus cure their paralyzed friend that they cut a hole in the roof of the house and lowered the sick man down to him (see Luke 5:18-19)! When John the Baptist sent his followers to ask Jesus if he were the Messiah, he answered, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (Luke 7:22). Jesus showed himself to be the long-awaited Savior by becoming a healer.

Church Continues Jesus' Work

If the whole purpose of the sacrament is to help heal people and continue the work Jesus did when he was on earth, how did it become so linked with death, dying and old age? Why did a sacrament of healing become known as "Extreme Unction" or "Last Rites"?

One reason for the change may be that when medical science was first developing, it was as likely to kill as to cure, so people put off calling a doctor until they were nearly dead and thus had little to lose. The same may have held true for doctors of the soul, with people waiting until the last minutes of life to call for a priest. Today, even though medical practices have improved and people are willing to call a medical doctor, the superstition that Anointing should be the

last action before death seems to have stuck. Another reason Anointing was seen as the last step in life's journey may be because people began to think of the sacrament as the final chance to reconcile with God before death. Because Anointing of the Sick has the power to forgive sin as well as heal, people waited until they were sure they were dying to ask for it. If possible, a dying person would go to Confession, receive Communion and then receive the Last Rites. If he or she were already so near death that Confession and Communion weren't possible, then they had the heavenly insurance, so to speak, of receiving forgiveness through the Last Rites.

The difficulty with all this is that while Anointing is a way to have your sins forgiven, it isn't supposed to take the place of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). Because Anointing was in danger of becoming just another form of confession at the time of death, Vatican II changed the prayers accompanying the anointing to reemphasize its healing character. The emphasis returned to prayers for recovery of physical, mental or spiritual health.

Sacrament of Health

Anointing of the Sick is the way we as Catholics call on the healing, restoring power of Jesus when we are at our lowest and most vulnerable. It's a way we can gain the strength to bear suffering with patience and dignity. And it's a way of reminding ourselves that no matter what happens in life or death, Jesus will be there beside us and the people we love. While it isn't intended to be used for our everyday aches and pains, sniffles and sneezes, it should be requested in those times of serious illness when we need a special sign of God's love and care.

