

Anointing of the Sick

Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ~ James 5:14-15

THROUGHOUT JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY, he healed the sick both physically and spiritually (see Mt 4:24; Mk 1:32; Lk 4:40; Jn 6:2). For example, when Jesus healed the paralyzed man, he said, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven,... Rise, take up your bed, and go home" (Mt 9:2, 6). Jesus commanded the Twelve to "[h]eal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, [and] cast out demons" (Mt 10:8; see also Lk 10:9), and he gave them the authority "to heal every disease and every infirmity" (Mt 10:1). The Twelve did as Jesus commanded and then passed on this authority to their successors, who are the bishops (see Mk 6:12-13; Acts 5:15-16). In this way, the Church received the mission and authority to heal every disease and every infirmity from Jesus himself, which she carries out primarily through the sacraments.

Now sickness, especially when it is prolonged or life-threatening, can give someone the reason to take time to pray and think about the meaning of life. Sickness, one of the consequences of the sin of our first parents, remains a part of our earthly existence even after Baptism. God sometimes even uses it as an instrument of love and mercy. Nevertheless, God's will is that finally all sickness will be healed. Most of the time, the body is able to heal (regain its strength and life) through various remedies, doctors, and preventive medicine. Like the body, the soul also is in need of healing. This healing is primarily accomplished through the sacraments.

In Baptism, we are restored to life by the washing away of sin and union with Christ. In Reconciliation, sins are forgiven and the effects of sin are healed. The Eucharist especially heals us because

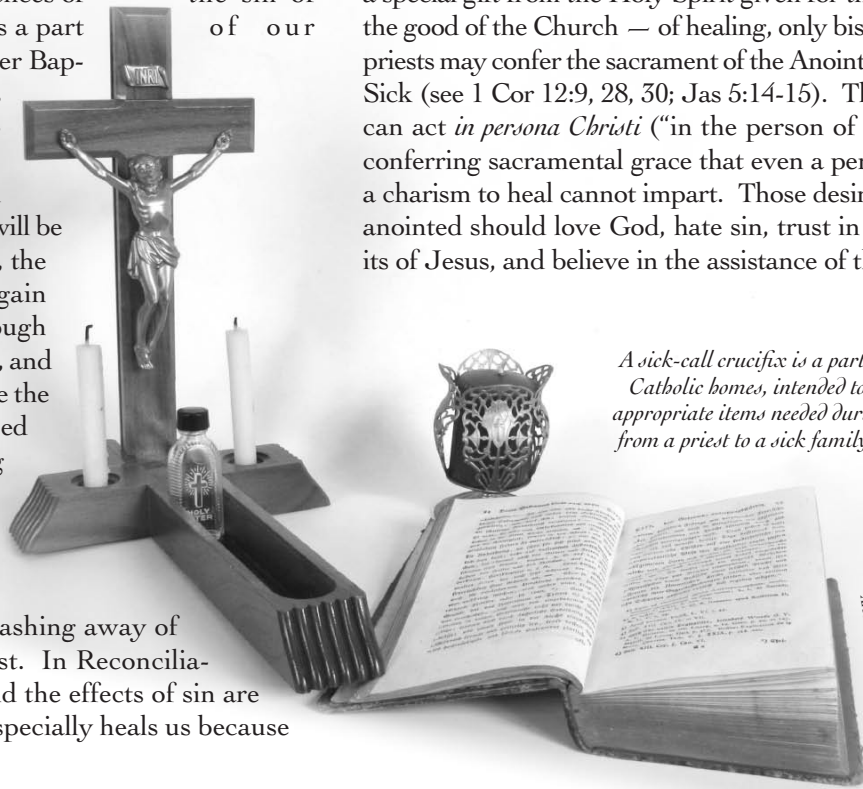
we receive Jesus himself, the Healer. In addition to these sacraments, Jesus also gave the Church the Anointing of the Sick (see Jas 5:14-15).

Who can receive the Anointing of the Sick?

This sacrament may be received by anyone who has a chronic, serious illness, by anyone preparing for a major surgery, or by anyone in danger of death. The sacrament may be repeated every time a person becomes seriously ill or when their condition worsens. Those experiencing the debilitations of old age also may receive it. Finally, Anointing of the Sick is intended for those who are "at the hour of their death," because, along with Reconciliation and Viaticum, Anointing of the Sick is one of the sacraments that prepare us for our Heavenly home.

Rite of Anointing of the Sick

Although some people have received the charism — a special gift from the Holy Spirit given for the sake of the good of the Church — of healing, only bishops and priests may confer the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (see 1 Cor 12:9, 28, 30; Jas 5:14-15). They alone can act *in persona Christi* ("in the person of Christ"), conferring sacramental grace that even a person with a charism to heal cannot impart. Those desiring to be anointed should love God, hate sin, trust in the merits of Jesus, and believe in the assistance of the saints.



A sick-call crucifix is a part of many Catholic homes, intended to provide appropriate items needed during a visit from a priest to a sick family member

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This is called a good disposition. Even though the sacrament may be celebrated at bedsides in private homes, hospitals, or other institutions, efforts should be made to gather at least a small community, especially family members and close friends.

In cases where death is not imminent, the sacrament may be received in a ceremony in church on the occasion of a parish Mass. At times the sacrament of Reconciliation may precede reception of this anointing. However the sacrament is celebrated, the following three elements must be included: the prayer of faith, a laying on of hands, and an anointing with oil.

In the “prayer of faith,” the priest asks those present to pray for the sick person. In the form of a litany, they ask God to give the sick person strength; freedom from all harm, sin, and temptation; relief from sufferings; and recovery of life and health.

Next, the priest lays hands on the head of the sick person and silently prays. The “laying on of hands” is the gesture that Jesus used to heal the sick: they brought *“the sick with various diseases ... to him; and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them”* (Lk 4:40; see also Mk 6:5; Lk 13:13). This same gesture is also used for calling upon the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:14-17). Likewise, when the priest lays his hands on the sick person, he is healing, blessing, and calling on the Holy Spirit.

Last, the priest anoints the sick person with the “oil of the sick,” blessed by the bishop at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week. Oil represents healing, strengthening, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, and again is an imitation of what Jesus did when he *“anointed*

“Those who are anointed can be joined more closely to the suffering and death of Christ.”



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with oil many that were sick and healed them” (Mk 6:13). The priest anoints both the forehead and the hands of the sick person, but he may also anoint other parts according to the local custom and/or the area of pain or injury. First, the priest anoints the forehead, saying, “Through this holy anointing, may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit” (*Pastoral Care of the Sick* 124). Then he anoints the hands, saying, “May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up” (*Pastoral Care of the Sick* 124). Other parts of the body may be anointed, and this is ordinarily done in silence.

What are the effects of the Anointing of the Sick?

The first effect of the Anointing of the Sick is the grace, God’s own life, which gives strength, comfort, peace, and courage to the sick person in order to overcome the difficulties and temptations of their illness or old age. Through the sacrament, the sick person is helped to trust Jesus more deeply, to know that *“the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed”* (Rom 8:18), and to be able to *“take up his cross”* and follow Jesus ever more closely (Lk 9:23). Furthermore, *“if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven”* (Jas 5:15). Forgiveness is a spiritual healing, a healing of the soul. If God so wills, the sick person may also experience a healing of the body. When this is the case, the healing of the body serves as a sign to all that God has visited his people and that a time will come when there will be no sickness.

Those who are anointed can be joined more close-



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“Sickness, especially when it is prolonged or life-threatening, can give someone the reason to take time to pray and think about the meaning of life.”

ly to the suffering and death of Christ. Sometimes the special mission or ministry given to the seriously ill or elderly is to suffer, just as Jesus suffered. Through the Anointing of the Sick, the anointed person is more easily able to *“rejoice in [his] sufferings”* (Col 1:24; see 1 Pt 4:13) and to willingly complete in their bodies *“what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions”* (Col 1:24) both for their own sake and for the sake of his Body, the Church. Because of their union with Christ and his Body, when those who are anointed bear their suffering for the sake of Christ, they are able to help the Body of Christ greatly: *“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together”* (1 Cor 12:26). This ability to participate in the saving work of Jesus to help the Body of Christ grow in every good and holy way is called “redemptive suffering.”

Finally, the sacrament of Anointing, especially

when celebrated at the hour of death with Reconciliation and Viaticum, gives the sick person the grace they need to journey from earth to their Heavenly home.

Prayer after Anointing

Lord Jesus Christ, you chose to share our human nature, to redeem all people, and to heal the sick. Look with compassion upon your servant N. whom we have anointed in your name with this holy oil for the healing of his/her body and spirit. Support him/her with your power, comfort him/her with your protection, and give him/her the strength to fight against evil. Since you have given him/her a share in your own passion, help him/her to find hope in suffering, for you are Lord for ever and ever. Amen

(Pastoral Care of the Sick 125).

(CCC 1420-1421, 1499-1525)