

The Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time
September 23, 2018

“Is any among you sick? Let him summon the presbyters 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)

Illness and suffering have always been an issue confronting humanity. From our first days until now, illness has forced mankind to experience its powerlessness, its limitations, its finitude. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it best in one sentence: *Every illness can make us glimpse death.* (CCC #1500) Illness may also lead to moments of anguish, doubt, confusion, anger, and despair for both the sick person and their family members. Illness can also affirm our faith by allowing us to see more distinctly those things which are vital and those which are not. Sickness may be the means for us to finally realize what things or people are essential in our lives and those which are not. Our sicknesses are both inseparable from our existence and means for our continued conversions. Our Catholic faith has tried to meet mankind in a special way during this time of suffering. To assist and support during those times, she offers humanity the sacrament of the **Anointing of the Sick**.

The sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick can be best understood as an extension of the love and mercy of God through His Son. The Catechism of the Catholic Church again offers a clear explanation of this thought: *Christ’s compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity are a resplendent sign that “God has visited his people” (Luke 7: 16) and that “the kingdom of God is close at hand” (Mark 1: 15). Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have need of.* CCC #1503)

Jesus encouraged His followers to take up their crosses and follow after him. To many, this line of Sacred Scripture can be both frightening and dreaded. How many are accepting of their crosses and willing to bear their burden for the Lord? To paraphrase many famous lines and quotes, how many are “too old” or “too tired” to have to deal with life’s sufferings or someone else's drama filled life? It is during these times, the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick offers peace and the forgiveness of sins to help those in need.

Allow me to conclude today by addressing one particular point which needs be clarified. The sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is **NOT** a sacrament reserved only for those at the point of death. In earlier times, this sacrament was associated with those who were dying and therefore received the name Extreme Unction. However, Sacred Scripture shows us that Jesus healed many people of various illnesses and forgave the sins of others who were not in danger of death. This sacrament is meant to restore health to God’s child who is suffering regardless of the physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual malady. Our loving Father wants to remind us, through this beautiful sacrament, that He is present to comfort, support, and heal us.