

# Journey OF Faith



## In Short:

- Anointing stems from Jesus' healing ministry.
- The sacrament follows basic steps.
- The sacrament is more than "last rites" or preparation for death.

## The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

When Diane found out from her pastor, Fr. Joe, that her parish was going to offer the sacrament of the anointing of the sick during one of its Sunday Masses, she felt hopeful for the first time in weeks. Her mother had been battling cancer for more than a year, and the difficult chemotherapy treatments hadn't done much.

As she watched her mother suffer, Diane went through periods of doubting God's love and even God's existence. Yet she clung to her faith with the hope that it would somehow see her through these sorrow-filled days.

Diane was with her mother for the Sunday liturgy and the anointing. Her mother was also eager to receive the sacrament. But before the anointing, Fr. Joe wanted to share something important with the rest of the assembly.

He told the assembly that the sacrament of the anointing of the sick was not as much about curing as it was about healing. Curing a person deals with conquering the disease and repairing the body;

healing involves breathing life and hope into the person's spirit. While it's important to continually pray for a cure, spiritual healing is more connected to a person's joy and inner peace. Healing gives a person power over disease, sickness, and even death.

At first, Diane was disappointed. She wanted her mother cured! But in the weeks following the anointing, Diane began to understand.

She and her mother focused less on the disease and more on their relationship. They felt free to share and to pray in ways they never could before. They began to feel at peace in a way they never had. Many times, in the months before her mother's death, Diane felt a special closeness with her mother, and her mother felt at peace with her illness. Diane thought to herself, *This could only be the work of the Spirit.*

## Physical and Spiritual Health

*Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude....It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is.*

CCC 1500–1501

People during Jesus' time saw a close relationship between soul and body. Jesus shared this attitude toward health and sickness. He was just as concerned with people's physical health as their spiritual health. In fact, the word *salvation* comes from the Latin word *salus*, which means "health."



In announcing the Good News of salvation, Jesus was declaring that God cares not only for our souls but for our bodies as well. By healing people's bodies as well as their souls, Jesus showed that the entire human being is touched by God's salvation.

Jesus often cured people's physical ailments as a symbol of the spiritual healing taking place within their hearts. The ancient world seemed to know what scientists are now rediscovering—physical and spiritual well-being are closely connected.

- Have you discovered a connection between your physical and spiritual health? What is it?
- Do you think having strong faith makes physical struggles easier? Why or why not?



## Jesus Shares His Healing Ministry

The Gospel makes it clear that Jesus shared his healing ministry with his apostles: "They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them" (Mark 6:13).

James 5:14–15 tells us, "Is anyone among 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, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven." This Scripture passage tells us that the healing ministry was very much active and alive in the early Church. Again, we hear of the powerful connection between the human body and the human spirit. We also learn the importance of knowing that our sins are forgiven, especially in the face of serious illness or death. Freedom from the destructive power of sin is, in itself, a tremendously healing force.

Read these instances of Jesus healing. What stands out to you? What do they tell you about his healing ministry?

Matthew 9:20–22

Mark 2:8–12

Luke 17:12–16

John 9:6–11

## How Is the Anointing of the Sick Celebrated Today?

*This sacred anointing of the sick was instituted by Christ our Lord as a true and proper sacrament of the New Testament. It is alluded to indeed by Mark, but is recommended to the faithful and promulgated by James the apostle and brother of the Lord.*

CCC 1511

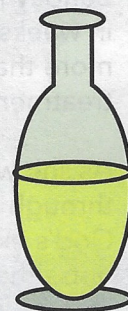
The order of this sacrament (the words and actions that accompany the sacrament) begins with a Liturgy of the Word so that those who have gathered may be strengthened and instructed by specially chosen Scripture passages.



Next is the laying on of hands, an ancient Christian gesture. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the laying on of hands symbolizes and grants the giving of the special grace of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the sick are singled out for the Spirit's special care. In today's ritual, the celebrant silently lays his hands upon the heads of those to be anointed.



Then the blessing of the oil is given. Oil is a powerful biblical symbol. In the ancient world, it was used by athletes before competition. Oil was also the fuel that gave people light for their homes, and oil lamps burned continually in the Jerusalem Temple. In the desert, oil brought relief against the drying winds.



Oil, a symbol of the penetrating presence of the Holy Spirit, helps us to understand what is happening during the anointing of the sick. Oil is rubbed and absorbed into the skin just like the Holy Spirit enters the sick person to help him or her be more aware of and open to the healing power of God.



Next is the actual anointing in which the sign of the cross is traced with oil on the head and oil is rubbed into the hands. The cross is the mark of Christ, a sign that we belong to him. Whether our particular sickness involves physical pain, emotional pain, or spiritual suffering, Christ the healer comes to us in our own special circumstances.



As the priest anoints the person with the precious oil, he says: "May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up."

## What Can Someone Expect From This Sacrament?

The anointing of the sick does not promise a miraculous physical cure; however, we are assured of healing in the ways that are most important. In other words, we can expect that God will give us exactly what we need at that moment (not necessarily what we want at the time) to assure our salvation and our greater peace with God.

As with all the sacraments, people must be sincere in their faith and come to the sacrament with an open mind and heart. Whether they desire mental and emotional healing and strength, an actual cure from a serious sickness or disease, or the grace to courageously face the last hours of their lives, God's response is always real and complete—not just to the body, not just to the spirit, but to the whole human person.

Not long ago, the anointing of the sick was called *extreme unction* (meaning "last anointing"). It was only for those close to death. When a priest was called to give the last rites, it was because that person was not expected to live much longer. But as we have already seen, the sacrament was not originally intended to be that way.

The Second Vatican Council helped to bring this sacrament back to its original purpose. The council changed *extreme unction* to *anointing of the sick*. It also said the sacrament is for anyone suffering from an illness. Dying people receive the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist at the same time they receive anointing of the sick. In this situation, prayers used in the anointing of the sick are changed slightly to ask more for spiritual strength than physical healing.

Priests are the only ones who can administer the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. However, healing ministry to the sick is a responsibility of the entire Christian community, not just the priest. If we are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we must keep in mind that much of his work on earth was taking care of the weak, the poor, the hungry, and the sick.

Family and friends can do a lot to meet the spiritual needs of loved ones who are sick. The spiritual needs of the sick may include forgiveness for wrongdoing, the need to resolve conflicts, the need to know they are cared for, the need to know that they are loved despite any disabilities, and the need to know that they will not be abandoned in their final hours. We are all challenged to do everything we can to reach out to those who are suffering, just as Jesus and his followers did.

- Even though only a priest can administer the sacrament, why is it important for the whole community to participate in healing ministry?



- What are some ways you can participate?



Complete the following sentences about the sacrament of the anointing of the sick.

The sacrament of the anointing of the sick is intended for \_\_\_\_\_ and not necessarily curing.

\_\_\_\_\_ symbolizes the giving of the special grace of the Holy Spirit.

Oil is a symbol of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Holy Spirit.

Anointing is done on the forehead by making the \_\_\_\_\_ with oil.

\_\_\_\_\_ is also rubbed onto the hands.

As the priest anoints, he says, \_\_\_\_\_.

Keeping in mind that sickness comes in many forms, think of someone who is in need of healing.



What are some simple, practical ways you can be the healing hands of God for that person?

***Journey of Faith for Teens: Catechumenate, C7 (826290)***

The process by which adults are initiated into the Catholic faith throughout the United States is now called the OCIA—the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults. “Order” is a clearer translation of the Latin term for the process formerly known as the RCIA—the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. People preparing for baptism and reception into the Church celebrate several rites as part of the order to which those rites belong—an order whose mission is to journey in the faith. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted the name change in 2021, with American dioceses introducing the name thereafter. For more information, please contact your local diocese.

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