

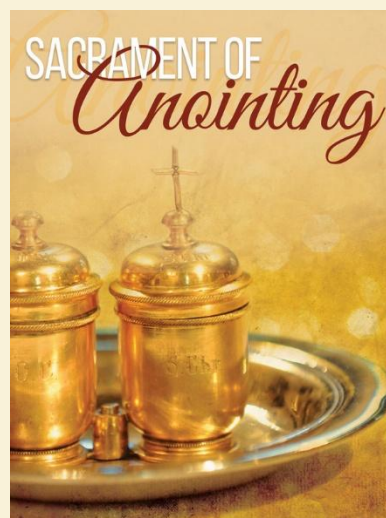


From the Desk of Father Peter

A Reflection on the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

Before the historic Vatican II Council, the only time the priest anointed someone was when they were near death. One of the gifts of Vatican II was to restore this Sacrament to an anointing of the sick rather than just those dying or near death (Epistle of St. James 5:13-15). Olive oil was blessed by the Bishop during Holy Week at the Chrism Mass and is the element used for this wonderful sacrament of healing for the parishioners of the parish.

Those who can receive the Sacrament are "those seriously impaired by illness or old age." The Church's Pastoral Care of the Sick even states that "those who are judged to have a serious mental illness and who would be strengthened by the sacrament may be anointed." It goes on to state the "sacrament may be repeated if the sick person recovers after being anointed and then again falls ill or if during the same illness the person's condition becomes more serious." A pastoral way of interpreting this teaching means: a person may be anointed more than once, but on the other hand the anointing is not just to be done out of habit or because it is available, but because the chronic illness or condition has become worse, even possibly a little worse (especially for example, with the



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elderly). On the other hand the sacrament shouldn't become routine or trivialized for every minor ache or pain or for a cold. This Sacrament of the Sick is the Church's way of being present to a sick member, expressing the concern of the community and praying for this particular person's recovery. The sick need never be isolated from the Church. The care of the sick is the work not only of priests but of all members of our faith communities. Finally, the Sacrament of the Sick now means that the deceased should not be anointed since sacraments can be received only by the living, but the priest can pray for the person that has just died and certainly be present to support the family. By Fr. Jim Hewes

Although we pray for healing in this sacrament we are also aware that sickness and suffering remains a mystery. When the person receiving the Sacrament of Anointing comes with faith, we know that the person will receive a healing (but not necessarily be cured, although that certainly does happen). The person after the anointing may have a lessening of, or elimination of the pain or a feeling of deep peace, or a renewed sense of hope. Whatever happens we are also invited not to "waste our suffering." When we face sickness we have the opportunity to "offer up" our suffering for members of the Body of Christ, especially for those suffering in our world and those who are alienated from Christ or the Church. This challenging situation invites the sick and suffering to focus on some reality outside themselves and to see that they are still capable of making a contribution to the good of others even on their sickbeds. Illness then does not diminish their participation in the Mystical Body of Christ.

In fact, we have the chance in our suffering to continue to share in the mission of Christ. The grace of the sacraments offers the sick the

strength and encouragement to bear the illness with dignity. “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for your sake of his body, that is the church” (Colossians 1:24). “For we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too” (2 Corinthians 1:5).

Viaticum (the Latin word which means “food for the journey”) offers a dying person that last opportunity on earth to have intimate union with Christ by receiving his Body & Blood in Holy Communion and thus is the most fitting sacrament for those close to death.

“Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin, save you and raise you up.”



God bless you.

Fr. Peter Enyan-Boadu