

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear friends,

With cold and flu season quickly approaching I thought it would be a good practice to administer the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick during all weekend Masses on the 18th and 19th of November.

The sacrament of Holy Anointing is one of the two sacraments of healing, the other being Penance/Confession. In former days it was commonly referred to as "Extreme Unction", and even today some still mistakenly call it "Last Rites". The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is not just for those who are in danger of death. The Church teaches us that it is a continuation of the Lord's healing ministry which He has shared with His Church. In the sacrament we pray for the healing of body and spirit for those who are seriously ill. Sometimes, a healing in body or spirit is granted, if it is for the good of the salvation of the sick person. However, the sacrament always gives an inner healing to the soul, giving the sick person the patience and strength to fight against the evil of illness and anxiety, to not lose hope in the Lord, and to increase their faith in His saving power. Like the sacrament of Penance this sacrament also forgives sin, both venial and mortal, when the sick person is unable to make a confession.

The proper minister of this sacrament is a bishop or priest, since the sacrament forgives sin. The Oil of the Sick is used in anointing, which has been blessed by the bishop in the annual Chrism Mass. The sick person's forehead and palms of their hands are anointed by the priest as he prays, "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." The sick person responds Amen to the prayer.

Those who can be anointed must be: 1) children and adults who have attained the age of reason (seven years old), 2) those whose health is seriously impaired by sickness or old age: this serious illness can be either physical or mental, 3) those preparing for surgery, 4) those who have been anointed before for the same illness, when their condition becomes even more serious, and 5) the elderly when they become noticeably weakened, even though no serious illness is present. Even those who are unconscious or have lost the use of reason may be anointed if, as believers, they would have asked for this sacrament when in control of their faculties.

So, as you can see, this sacrament is not for a "case of the sniffles", it is for those suffering serious illness in body or mind. During the anointing, all are invited to pray for those being anointed, as well as for all the sick. Those wishing to be anointed will be invited up to the sanctuary steps to receive the sacrament, or if they are unable to do so, I will come to them. They should also be prepared to receive the sacrament worthily by being free from any serious sin.

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Just as we do our best to take reasonable care of our bodily health, we should all the more do so with our spiritual health. The sacrament of Anointing helps the seriously ill do both. If you are caring for a seriously ill loved-one, please make sure that they have the opportunity to receive this sacrament. They should not follow the wrongful practice of delaying the reception of the sacrament.

Due to privacy laws, hospitals, hospices, and nursing care facilities cannot contact a priest for Anointing, unless the patient gives them permission to do so. If you or a loved one is hospitalized or in a care facility, please have a family or friend contact the nearest priest to come to visit and administer Anointing.

I realize that often people want "their" priest to anoint them. Usually that is possible when they're nearby. But if they are hospitalized or in a care facility a distance away, it is best to contact the priest in that locality, especially if they are in danger of death. There's no just reason to waste valuable time when a soul needs the strength that the sacrament of Anointing gives, while waiting for their pastor to drive a distance when another nearby priest would be available.

Please remember, the Anointing of the Sick is not the "Last Rites". Receiving the sacrament does not mean that you are dying. It is a sacrament of healing, not of death! When administered to the dying, it does form part of the "Last Rites" of the Church, which are: the sacrament of Penance/Confession (if the person is able to confess), the sacrament of Anointing, the granting of the Apostolic Pardon and its plenary indulgence, the administration of Viaticum (the person's last Holy Communion, if they are able to receive it), and lastly a blessing. The Last Rites also include prayers for the dying, such as the litany of saints, and Scripture readings.

Sadly, in my priestly ministry, I have encountered a few people who did not want to be anointed because they thought it would make them die. The sooner we get the idea of Holy Anointing being only for the dying out of our minds, the better. The Lord is here to heal and help us, not kill us!

As we prepare to celebrate this sacrament, let us keep all of our sick brothers and sisters in our prayers. Give them a call, send them a text or email or card. Drop in for a visit, if they want that, and maybe bring them a treat or some flowers. Simple gestures of concern and love have a profound and positive effect on their wellbeing. We shouldn't forget their caregivers. Let them know how much we appreciate what they do, and the sacrifices they make to tend to our sick loved-ones. They need our support and prayers too.

God bless you all, and keep you in good health!

In Christ,
Fr. Pat