

# Father's Notes

October 20, 2024

“Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest human problems....sometimes leading to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also cause maturation, helping one discern what is not essential. Illness often provokes a search for God and a return to him” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1500-1501).

Anointing of the Sick is a sacrament that is commonly misunderstood, so perhaps a brief explanation is in order. It's rooted in Jesus' ministry—Jesus, the divine healer—the Church upholds a sacrament for the purpose of strengthening those tried by illness. The priest anoints in the name of and with the power of Christ himself. There are three principal ritual actions that take place: the prayer of faith (see James 5:15), laying on of hands (see Luke 4:40), and anointing with oil (see Mark 6:13).

It “supports the sick in their struggle against illness and continues Christ's messianic work of healing” (Pastoral Care of the Sick, 98). While it doesn't suddenly make all things pleasant or easy, it unites us with Christ the healer in a powerful way, in a time of particular need.

Who is it for? Unlike Extreme Unction of former times, which was administered only at the point of death, as the guidelines from our Archdiocese explain (echoing the Pastoral Care for the Sick manual), it is for the living faithful who have reached the age of reason, whose health is seriously impaired; those who are weakened by advanced age; and those who will be undergoing surgery in response to a serious condition. Further, it should be administered at the beginning of one's illness yet may be repeated when the serious condition remains or worsens.

While Archdiocesan guidelines state that a communal service with Anointing should occur at least once a year, some parishes do so more frequently. Our parishes currently schedule communal services each month. What I find is that people are being anointed month after month, while I've never had the chance to talk with them personally to understand their infirmity or to pray with them personally. These same guidelines add that the sacrament should not be given indiscriminately or to any person whose health is not seriously impaired (see PCS, 8).

Please know, the intent is not to be stingy with a powerful source of grace, but to use administer it as the Church asks of us. I remind us that it's not the only source of grace, the only way that Jesus comes to be our strength in times of need and weakness. Please, please, let either Fr. Ben or myself know if you are struggling and in need of strength from Jesus the Divine Healer. It's my privilege to pray with you and anoint as necessary.



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