

Supplemental Information for
The Celebration of the Christian Mystery—Sacraments
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Session 10: “The Anointing of the Sick, a Sacrament of Healing”

Suggested Environment

As was suggested in the environment for the Sacrament of Confirmation, it might be nice to have a small bottle of olive oil or even a small clear dish with several table spoons of it sitting near your candle.

Sharing Our Good News

Last week’s discussion of reconciliation should have prompted some personal action on the part of each participant. It may be helpful to ask what “individual action” members of your group took in response to discussion and meditation on the sacrament. You may even ask if someone took advantage of the sacrament by going to confession over the weekend. You might conclude by observing that there is an element of reconciliation connected with this week’s sacrament of Anointing.

Exploring the Catechism

This section of the Catechism introduces the difficulty of being sick. In addition to our feelings of powerlessness, sickness also is a cause of withdrawal from the community that is so important to our life as a Christian. You may want to try this experiment with your group. Ask them to complete the sentence out loud with the first word that comes into their head. The sentence is: “When I am sick I want to be left _____.” Ninety-five percent of the time the word that is said is “alone.” We have this desire to be left alone when we are ill and that can further isolate us from a caring community when we have serious illness. So there are tremendous charitable opportunities for us to reach out to those who are sick in conjunction with the Church’s sacramental life that is extended to those experiencing illness or potential surgery through the sacrament of anointing.

A recurrent theme that needs discussion and reflection is that of Jesus healing physically **and** from sin. From the earliest days the Church continued the healing mission of Jesus. In fact, the first hospitals and hospices were formed in the West by early religious orders, even if that meant only loving care as a disease took its course. The best story that highlights both physical cure and forgiveness of sin is [Mark 1:1-12. \(highlighted link\)](#) which is the cure of the paralytic who was lowered through the roof. The suggested reading from James is an important scriptural reference to the early Church’s position on anointing as a sacrament.

Scripture: Pondering the Word

James 5: 14-16

14

Is anyone among you sick?⁶ 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,

15

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.⁷

16

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful.

Footnotes:

⁶ [14] In case of sickness a Christian should ask for the presbyters of the church, i.e., those who have authority in the church (cf [Acts 15:2, 22-23](#); [1 Tim 5:17](#); [Titus 1:5](#)). They are to pray over the person and anoint with oil; oil was used for medicinal purposes in the ancient world (see [Isaiah 1:6](#); [Luke 10:34](#)). In [Mark 6:13](#), the Twelve anoint the sick with oil on their missionary journey. In the name of the Lord: by the power of Jesus Christ.

⁷ [15] The results of the prayer and anointing are physical health and forgiveness of sins. The Roman Catholic Church (Council of Trent, Session 14) declared that this anointing of the sick is a sacrament "instituted by Christ and promulgated by blessed James the apostle."

Sharing Question

This is a very worthwhile question especially if some members of the group have been anointed or received this sacrament. I would suggest perhaps drawing out not only the experience but perhaps how the individual felt after receiving the sacrament. In my own case, prior to surgery, I felt a great sense of peace just several hours later as I was wheeled down the hall to the anesthesia area.

Conversation may come up at this point as to why the Church moved from what used to be called Extreme Unction to Anointing of the Sick. There is mention of this shift in the fifth paragraph of the next section but you may find this link to [Pope Paul VI's document of 1972](#) helpful. In promulgating this restored approach to anointing the Pope gives a brief history of the sacrament in his letter worth reading.

Exploring the *Catechism* (continued)

This section can provoke a great deal of conversation around the idea of pain and suffering and illness in the face of a loving and caring God. The same illness that can drive individuals away from their faith can also be the source of a more profound experience of God

in our lives. Illness and suffering as part of the human condition are intimately tied into the very mystery of Christ's own suffering and death. It is important to read or have someone read section 1505 from the Catechism because that is more of a broad explanation of what is meant by "Redemptive Passion." Ultimately, Christians have to be satisfied with an understanding of what our true home is, and that this life, with its suffering and sorrow as well as its joys, is not our final home. It would be most helpful to encourage everyone to underline the sentence on the bottom of page 57 that reads "The grace of the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is one of **strengthening, peace and courage** leading to healing of soul and body." Sometimes healing means simply that we kneel before the mystery of that which we do not understand but accept in confidence because of what our God has promised to us.

It is often hard to clearly speak of the community aspects of anointing when it so often occurs privately and individually. But it is well to encourage an awareness that we, as Christ's hands in the world, should be aware of our obligation to reach out to those in our community who are ill with both our hands as well as our prayers. Hence, many churches are looking into the idea and role of parish nursing to foster the community's ability to reach out to those who are ill. If you have interests in the idea of parish nursing, some basic information is available at [this site supported by the Presbyterian Church](#).

Sharing Our Faith

Good questions that need little comment. It is always an interesting and challenging topic to bring up as in the fourth bullet point: "How can I better prepare for my own death?" If this topic does come up, remember that Anointing does have that assurance of forgiveness of our sins and graces necessary to help us in our final hours. It is and has been both a sacrament of faith and hope even though healing at this hour of our life may solely be for our spiritual benefit.

Living the Good News

It would be nice to remind all our groups that Christ the King has a "Prayerline" with phone numbers published each week in the bulletin. Likewise, both hospitals in town may be in need of Eucharistic Ministers to take communion to those who are ill from our parish. Pastoral care departments of both can be contacted for additional information.

Lifting our Hearts

I would strongly encourage a round of spontaneous prayer for those in our families and friends who we know are ill before concluding with the ending reading and prayer. Just end a request with the words: "Lord, hear our prayer," and the response together "Let us pray to the Lord."

Addendum Note: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to allaabs@comcast.net