

**Respect Life Month Curia Mass  
Catholic Pastoral Center  
St. Viator Chapel**

**October 9, 2013**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: today we gather to celebrate our annual Curia Mass for Respect Life Month. The theme for our observance of this month here in the United States comes from the call of our Holy Father when he encourages us to “open your hearts to life.” Having our hearts open to life is very broad and applies to a variety of issues including abortion, contraception, embryonic stem cell research, euthanasia, and the death penalty, just to name a few. For our observance of this month here at the curia, the choice has been made to focus on illness and suffering as a challenge to human life and the response of the Church to this challenge with the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

In introducing this sacrament, the Catechism of the Catholic Church begins its treatment by addressing illness in human life. We read the following: “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. Every illness can make us glimpse death.”<sup>1</sup> Because of the fact that illness and suffering cause us to confront this reality of death, it can have a very profound impact on our lives. For some, the experience of illness can lead to “anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God.”<sup>2</sup> Others find it an opportunity to search for God in the midst of their suffering and to return to Him if they have drifted away from Him. In either case, the experience of illness and suffering constitutes a significant trial for any Christian.

In the Gospel passage that we just heard about the Good Samaritan, we see the compassion that Christ has toward those who experience this trial of suffering. He makes it His concern to see to it that the traveler who has been injured on his journey is not left alone, but is taken care of and treated with love and mercy. Christ shows his preferential love for the sick elsewhere in the Gospel as he heals the illnesses of those who come to Him burdened with their infirmities. This assistance given during those years of His public ministry while here on earth has been passed on to His Church, specifically by means of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

There is a common misconception among some people who see this sacrament as some sort of magical anointing. There is an expectation that it will bring about a physical healing in the person who is ill, and if that does not happen, their faith can be challenged. To combat that, we are reminded that the physical healings that Christ brought to those who were ill were always accompanied by some sort of spiritual healing. Christ's healing addresses the whole person and the healing that we are most in need of is not physical, but spiritual. In fact, the Catechism says that the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick brings about a "restoration of health, *if* it is conducive to the salvation of [the] soul."<sup>3</sup> More important than a merely physical healing is the strength that Christ gives to us to patiently endure whatever suffering we have and to never lose hope in the fact that He is close to us and will never abandon us in the midst of those struggles.

While it is important for us to be aware of the purpose and effects of this sacrament for our own well-being when we encounter illness and suffering, it is likewise important for us to be aware of it for the well-being of others. Our life as Christians is not isolated from the lives of others. Rather, we are intimately connected to one another in the Body of Christ

and are called to assist others in their struggles. Although it is often easier to pass by and let somebody else deal with the sick and suffering, we should strive to imitate the Good Samaritan who is not afraid to go out of his way and step out of his comfort zone in order to be of assistance to those individuals. If we know somebody who has begun to be in the danger of death due to sickness or old age,<sup>4</sup> we should encourage them to make a good sacramental confession and then receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. By doing so, we are demonstrating a profound respect for their life. It shows that we are concerned not just about their physical well-being, but more importantly, their spiritual well-being which is directly connected to their salvation. To show that level of concern for somebody's eternal destiny is the greatest form of compassion that we can have and it demonstrates openness to life that extends beyond the short span of years here on our earthly pilgrimage to the eternal life of communion with God and all of the saints in the glory of Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> CCC, 1500.

<sup>2</sup> CCC, 1501.

<sup>3</sup> CCC, 1532.

<sup>4</sup> cf. CIC, canon 1004, § 1.