

Catechesis for the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

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The Gospels are filled with signs of Jesus' compassion for the sick, both in spirit and in body. Jesus charged his disciples and with them the whole Church to "cure the sick." His love for the sick continues in the Church today. His healing power is a definitive sign that the Kingdom of God is close at hand and is a clear announcement of his victory over sin, suffering and death. His spirit draws all Christians to care for those who suffer in body and soul. Jesus, the divine physician of our souls and bodies, is at work in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick: touching our wounds in order to heal us and restoring us to communion with his Father in the Holy Spirit. Christ's personal solitude for the sick is expressed in the words of James: "Is anyone among you sick? 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, 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." In the Latin Church, the normative reference point for the catechesis for the Anointing of the Sick is the *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*.

Dioceses and parishes should present a catechesis for the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick that

- Examines the meaning of human suffering, sickness, aging, healing, and death in the light of the Christian faith
- Emphasizes the solidarity with the suffering Christ that Christians experience through their own illness- Christ was no stranger to the world of human suffering upon himself, voluntarily and innocently
- Includes instruction on the basic symbols of the sacrament: the laying- on of hands, the anointing of the head and hands with blessed oil, and the words of the sacramental formula
- Teaches that "like all the sacraments the Anointing of the Sick is a liturgical and communal celebration, whether it takes place in the family home, a hospital or church, for a single sick person or a whole group of sick persons
- Clarifies that the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick "is not a sacrament intended only for those who are at the point of death," but that any baptized person who is seriously or chronically ill or in danger of death from advancing age may receive this sacrament
- Makes clear, equally, that the Anointing of the Sick is also a preparation for death, to be received by those at the point of death; integral to the last rites with which the Church fortifies her faithful in their last hours and which Catholics value so highly, Anointing of the Sick, with the Sacrament of Penance and the Eucharist as Viaticum, form the sacraments of departure
- Explains the effects of the sacrament: "the uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church; the strengthening, peace, and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age; the forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to attain it through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation; the restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul; and the preparation for passing over to eternal life"

- Teaches that a person who has previously received the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick may receive it again if the condition worsens still or if the condition initially improves and then worsens again
- Explains that those preparing for serious surgery, the elderly whose infirmity declines further, and seriously ill children should ask for sacramental anointing
- Encourages the members of the parish to visit and care for the sick and express concern and love for them
- Teaches that only bishops and priests are ministers of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the sick