



ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

SICKNESS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord

“By the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of the priests the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, that he may raise them up and save them. And indeed she exhorts them to contribute to the good of the People of God by freely uniting themselves to the Passion and death of Christ.” (Vatican II, the Church) (1499)

Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. Every illness makes us glimpse death. (1500)

Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him. (1501)

SCRIPTURE

The Old Testament

It is the experience of Israel that illness is mysteriously linked to sin and evil, and that faithfulness to God restores life: “For I am the Lord, your healer” (Ex 15:26). Isaiah announces that God will usher in a time for Zion when he will pardon every offence and heal every illness. (Cf. Is 33:24) (1502)

Christ the physician

Christ’s compassion toward the sick and his many healings are a resplendent sign that “God has visited his people” and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand.

Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have need of. “I was sick and you visited me” (Mt 25:36).

[Christ’s] preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward those who suffer in body and soul. It is the source of tireless efforts to comfort them. (1503)

Jesus asks the sick to believe. He makes use of signs to heal: spittle, laying on of hands, mud and washing. The sick try to touch him, “for power came forth from him and healed them all” (Lk 6:19). And so in the sacraments Christ continues to ‘touch’ us in order to heal us. (1504)

“He took our infirmities and bore our diseases” (Mt. 8:17 cf Is 53:4). [Christ’s] healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover.

On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the ‘sin of the world’, of which illness is only a consequence. By his Passion and death Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him. (1505)

‘Heal the sick...’

Jesus associates [his disciples] in his ministry of compassion and healing: “So they went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them” (Mk 6:12-13). (1506)

The risen Lord renews his mission (“In my name ...they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover”. Mk 16:17-18). These signs demonstrate in a special way that Jesus is truly ‘God who saves’. (1507)

A SACRAMENT OF THE SICK

The Church has received a charge from the Lord

“Heal the sick!” (Mt. 10:8) The Church has received this charge from the Lord. She believes in the life-giving presence of Christ, the physician of souls and bodies, a presence particularly active through the sacraments especially the Eucharist. (1509)

The apostolic Church has its own rite for the sick: “Is there any among you sick? Let him call for the elders [*presbyters*] of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (Jas 5:14-15). Tradition has recognised this rite as one of the seven sacraments.

The Church believes and confesses that among the seven sacraments there is one especially intended to strengthen those who are being tried by illness, the Anointing of the Sick.

“This sacred anointing of the sick was instituted by Christ the Lord as a true and proper sacrament of the New Testament. It is alluded to indeed by Mark, but it is recommended to the faithful and promulgated by James the apostle and brother of the Lord” (Council of Trent). (1511).

This sacrament is given to those who are seriously ill by anointing them on the forehead and hands with the duly blessed oil saying: “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 form of the sacrament]. (1513)

Who receives this sacrament?

It is not a sacrament only for those who are at the point of death. As soon as anyone of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly arrived. (1514)

The sacrament may be repeated in the case of another grave illness, or even during the period of the same illness, and before a serious operation. The elderly whose frailty becomes pronounced may also receive this sacrament. (1514-5)

Who administers this sacrament?

Only bishops or priests are ministers of the Anointing of the Sick.

The faithful should encourage the sick to call for a priest to receive this sacrament. (1516)

How is this sacrament celebrated?

The celebration of the sacrament includes the following principal elements: the 'priests of the Church' - in silence - lay hands on the sick; they pray over them in the faith of the Church - this is the *epiclesis* proper to this sacrament; they then anoint them with oil blessed, if possible, by the bishop. (1519)

THE EFFECTS OF THIS SACRAMENT

A particular gift of the Holy Spirit. The first grace of this sacrament is one of strengthening, peace and courage to overcome the difficulties that go with the condition of serious illness or the frailty of old age. The Holy Spirit renews trust and faith in God and strengthens against temptation, discouragement or anguish. This assistance from the Lord is meant to lead the sick person to healing of the soul, but also of the body if such is God's will. Furthermore, 'if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven'. (1520)

Union with the Passion of Christ. In a certain way the sick person is *consecrated* to bear fruit by configuration to the Saviour's redemptive Passion. Suffering, a consequence of original sin, acquires a new meaning; it becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus. (1521)

An ecclesial grace. The Church in the communion of saints, intercedes for the sick person, and he, for his part, through the grace of this sacrament, contributes to the sanctification of the Church and for all for whom the Church suffers and offers herself through Christ to the Father. (1522)

A preparation for the final journey. It is also called the 'sacrament of those departing'. The Anointing of the Sick completes our conformity to the death and Resurrection of Christ, just as Baptism began it. It completes the holy anointings of Baptism and Confirmation. This last anointing fortifies the end of our earthly life like a solid rampart for the final struggles before entering the Father's house. (1523)

VIATICUM, THE HOLY EUCHARIST – THE LAST SACRAMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN

In addition to the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, the Church offers those who are about to leave this life the Eucharist as viaticum. Communion in the body and blood of Christ, received at this moment of 'passing over' to the Father, has a particular significance and importance. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6:54). The Eucharist is here the sacrament of passing over from death to life, from this world to the Father. (1524)

THE SACRAMENTS THAT PREPARE FOR OUR HEAVENLY HOMELAND

Just as the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist form a unity called the 'sacraments of Christian initiation', so too it can be said that Penance, Anointing of the Sick and the Eucharist as viaticum constitute at the end of Christian life 'the sacraments that prepare for our heavenly homeland' or the sacraments that complete our earthly pilgrimage. (1525)

IN BRIEF

- **The sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick has as its purpose the conferral of a special grace on the Christian experiencing the difficulties inherent in the condition of grave illness or old age. (1527)**
- **The proper time for receiving this holy anointing has certainly arrived when the believer begins to be in danger of death because of illness or old age. (1528)**
- **Each time a Christian falls seriously ill, he may receive the Anointing of the Sick, and also when, after he has received it, the illness worsens. (1529)**
- **Only priests (presbyters and bishops) can give the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, using oil blessed by the bishop, or if necessary by the celebrating presbyter himself. (1530)**
- **The celebration of the Anointing of the Sick consists essentially in the anointing of the forehead and hands of the sick person (in the Roman Rite) or of other parts of the body (in the Eastern rite), the anointing being accompanied by the liturgical prayer of the celebrant asking for the special grace of this sacrament. (1531)**
- **The special grace of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick has as its effects:**
 - **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 obtain it through the sacrament of Penance;**
 - **the restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul;**
 - **the preparation for passing over to eternal life. (1532)**