

## Reflections on the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

There is a lot more to being sick than just feeling bad physically. The physical side of sickness is often the less serious part. When I am sick, it is not only my body that is hurting. **I hurt in soul and spirit too.** The very first paragraph of the Rite for the Sacrament of Anointing tells us:

Suffering and illness have always been among the greatest problems that trouble the human spirit. Christians feel and experience pain as do all other people; yet their faith helps them to grasp more deeply the mystery of suffering and to bear their pain with greater courage. From Christ's words they know that sickness has meaning and value for their own salvation and for the salvation of the world. They also know that Christ, who during his life often visited and healed the sick, loves them in their illness. *(Pastoral Care of the Sick, #1)*

When the priest anoints first your forehead and then the palms of your hands, he prays:

**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 say you and raise you up.**

*(Pastoral Care of the Sick #124)*

The Church wants to "speak" to you about the healing ministry of Jesus; but even more, the Church wants to let Jesus' healing power "touch" you. Healing was at the heart of Jesus' ministry, and he wanted this ministry to be continued by his disciples.



The community's **care and concern** are a symbol - a sacrament - of the Lord's own concern for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the sick. Jesus wants his ministry of healing to continue throughout the ages. We who are the Body of Christ today proclaim God's Kingdom of **wholeness** and **salvation** in both word and deed. Celebrating the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick helps us see who we are as Church: the people who carry Jesus' healing ministry.

But the sacrament is not merely something you *receive* when you are sick. By your reception of the sacrament, you gift the Church. You offer a sign to the community. In celebrating the sacrament, you give witness to your baptismal promise to die with Christ crucified. The sacrament is a way of telling the community that you are prepared to fill up in your flesh what is lacking in Christ's sufferings for the salvation of the world (see Colossians 1:24).

This exchange of gifts and signs - this communication between the sick and the healthy members of the community - is at the heart of the sacrament. The Church assures you that your suffering is not useless but has meaning and value for the salvation of the whole Church. At the same time the Church asks the Lord to heal you and raise you up. Even though you are sick, you are a productive member of the parish community, contributing to the welfare of all by associating yourself freely with Christ's passion and death.

During the rite, after the readings and intercessory prayers, the priest will (silently, without saying anything) **lay his hands on your head.**

This gesture means that *you* are the special concern of the Church. It means that *you* are loved by Jesus who heals the sick. It is a gesture of blessing.

The word *anoint* means "**to rub oil on.**" What makes the oil special - sacramental - is the blessing said over it, much as a blessing is what makes baptismal water different from other water and, in a most special way, what makes the Eucharistic bread and wine different from ordinary bread and wine.

The new rite for the Anointing of the Sick is best celebrated in a setting in which the sacramental signs given and received can be exchanged in the best way possible: the parish. **When you are anointed in the parish setting, you will feel in a special way your community's support for you in your illness,** and your gift of faith and witness to the Church can be received by your parish community.

Excerpts from *Would You Like to Be Anointed?* By Thomas Richstatter

St. Martin's will celebrate the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick on February 2 & 3, 2008.
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