

Source and Summit Anointing of the Sick

I'd like to begin this morning with a story of my own experience with the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. On October 17, 2013, as many of you know, I suffered a serious heart attack here at the office and through the grace of God and the work of many that morning, I was able to survive to be here today. One of the first visitors I had at the hospital besides my family was Fr. Rich. I asked him did he bring his oils with him. Well, I was to be his deacon that morning for a funeral and he went ahead with the funeral and burial and came directly to the hospital. So I didn't get a chance to be anointed after my ordeal that morning. So later that afternoon, Fr. Dave came to visit and he did bring his oils. Sure enough the first words out of my mouth were, could you anoint me. At that moment, it was not that I was afraid to die or as many people feel that with the priest being there, I was dying, I just had an overwhelming sense that I needed the grace that the sacrament of the sick could provide me at that moment. This moment of grace receiving the sacrament helped put me in the right frame of mind so that while my body physically healed, my soul and my spirit could also heal as well. Then with continued prayers and the grace of God, it happened. So the sacrament provided me with comfort and support. I have seen many people in ministry to the sick and dying also have that sense of comfort and support, knowing that God has enveloped them in their moment of need. Christ in his ministry commanded that sick be cared for and it is through this sacrament that the Church, in the person of the priest, reaches out to those who are in need.

My second story has to do with a person that I came to know over the course of a few years. It was unfortunate that because of his profession of being a police officer and him seeing many

horrific and terrible things, that his faith, though it never left him, was not something that he turned to readily, especially during the course of his final illness. The illness robbed him of the peace that he needed at the end of his life. So he struggled until one day toward the end, I suggested that maybe being anointed might be something he could consider. At first he sloughed it off, but eventually acquiesced. After his private time with the priest he was a different man and his last three days were ones of peace. That was the effect of that sacrament for him. It brought him a sense of peace that had escaped his life up to that point. When Jesus healed the sick, many times those who were suffering were not only suffering because of the physical illness but the spiritual one as well. In other words, those who were ill were many times ostracized from the community- they were socially separated from other people and even from their own families. They constantly had to bear the stigma of their illness, often having to walk around announcing that they were unclean. For the paralytic, to use an example, he had to sit and shout over the crowd in order to be heard and then when he was heard, he was dismissed. The healing that Jesus gave brought those people peace where they were no longer defined by their illness. When my friend was able to be released of the burden he was carrying in his heart, he too was no longer defined by that and his death could then be peaceful.

We all know that the priest is often called to anoint someone for a physical illness or an upcoming surgery. But today we hear so many people suffering from mental illness- in other words they are soul sick. Perhaps we ourselves or even someone we know is soul sick right now, suffering from depression or the effects of addiction. The Sacrament of Anointing is for them too.

Many of you remember Joseph Cardinal Bernadin and the cancer that he suffered at the end of his life. He penned a book called *The Gift of Peace* during his final illness. It is one of my favorites and if you haven't read it, I encourage you to pick it up. God gives his peace to all of us. He is able to do that in many ways and one of those ways is through the Sacrament of Anointing. When we are at peace, even if we are in the midst of serious illness or even our final illness, God can use us to help others see what is really essential. When we see this, we realize that our time on Earth is only temporary and that our true home is in heaven. When we are able to embrace the graces that God gives us through the Sacrament of Anointing, we become His instruments here on Earth. Others see that there is something bigger than the illness or the suffering or the pain. And that something that is bigger is eternal life with God. So in the midst of our suffering, we still can be instruments in the hand of God. Our ultimate goal is eternal life and it is through this anointing that God helps us see that. We let go, as Cardinal Bernadin says of the non-essential, so that the essential- eternal life with God may shine through.

My prayer today is that all of us receive the graces of comfort, support, inner peace, healing of soul and one day eternal life with God.