

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

MEANING OF THE SACRAMENT

The Lord himself showed great concern for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the sick and commanded his followers to do likewise. This is clear from the gospels, and above all from the existence of the sacrament of anointing, which he instituted and which is made known in the letter of James. Since then the Church has never ceased to celebrate this sacrament for its members by the anointing and the prayer of its priests, commending



those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, that he may raise them up and save them (James 5: 14-16). Moreover, the Church exhorts them to associate themselves willingly with the passion and death of Christ (Romans 8:17), and thus contribute to the welfare of the people of God.

Those who are seriously ill need the special help of God's grace in this time of anxiety, lest they be broken in spirit and under the pressure of temptation perhaps weakened in their faith.

This is why, through the sacrament of anointing, Christ strengthens the faithful who are afflicted by illness, providing them

with the strongest means of support

THE COMMUNITY

The caring community is the underlying foundation of the sacrament, without which it cannot speak effectively. Our God is a God who became flesh in Jesus Christ. He willed that his care and concern should become incarnate in the flesh and blood of people who believed in him. All who contributed in any way to the health and well-being and comfort of the sick and elderly are an integral part of the sacramental care of the Church. The fostering of a caring community is a primary concern if the sacrament of anointing is to be intelligible.

EUCCHARIST

All sacraments flow from and lead to the Eucharist. In the Eucharist is found the central memorial of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. In the Eucharist is found the chief healing and reconciling expression of the Church. The Church provides for celebrating the anointing of the sick within the context of the Mass. Likewise the Church provides for frequent communion to the sick, linking them with the Christian community and with Christ. And when Christians are called to seal their baptism by death, the Church nourishes them with the Viaticum for their final journey. There is no greater gift that the Christian community can share, in the context of care for the sick and dying, than

to break with them the bread that is Christ. In this action is summed up all of the ministry of Christ and of the Church.

RECIPIENTS OF THE SACRAMENT

The anointing of the sick can be administered to a member of the faithful who, after having reached the use of reason, begins to be in danger due to sickness or old age. The sacrament can be repeated whenever the sick person again falls into a serious sickness after convalescence or whenever a more serious crisis develops during the same sickness.

THE RITE

The celebration of the sacrament consists especially in the laying on of hands by the priest of the Church, the offering of the prayer of faith, and the anointing of the sick with oil made holy by God's blessing. It is the oil that is blessed by the bishop at the Mass of Chrism. The sick person is anointed on the forehead and on the hands.

VIATICUM FOR THE DYING

The celebration of the Eucharist as Viaticum is the sacrament proper to the dying Christian. When possible, Viaticum should be received within Mass so that the sick person may receive Communion under both kinds. Communion received as Viaticum should be considered a special sign of participation in the mystery which is celebrated in the Eucharist: the mystery of the death of the Lord and his passage to the Father. All baptized Christians who are able to receive Communion are bound to receive Viaticum by reason of the precept to receive Communion when in danger of death from any cause. Priests with pastoral responsibility must see that the celebration is not delayed; but that the faithful are nourished by it while still in full possession of their faculties.

If no priest is available, Viaticum may be brought to the sick by a deacon or another member of the faithful, who has been duly appointed to give the Eucharist to the faithful. In this care a deacon follows the rite prescribed by the ritual; other ministers use the rite for the distribution of communion, but with the special word given in the ritual for the Viaticum.