

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Jesus' healing ministry is the basis for this sacrament.
- The entire human being—body and soul—is touched by God's salvation.
- This sacrament includes the laying on of hands and anointing.



The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

Jesus was concerned about people's physical as well as spiritual health. In fact, the word *salvation* is derived from the Latin *salus*, which means "health." In announcing the good news of salvation, Jesus was declaring that God cares for us completely—body, soul, and spirit.

Jesus healed people's spiritual lives by assuring them that God forgives their sins and gives them the power to love and care for others. Jesus also healed people's ailments as a sign of God's power and as an example of caring for the entire person.

By healing people's bodies as well as their souls, Jesus showed that the entire human being is touched by God's salvation.

- *When has your physical health been affected by your mental health or vice versa?*



Throughout the Gospels, we read of Jesus' concern for the sick. Read the following healing accounts from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, then answer the questions below.

Matthew 8:5–13

Matthew 15:21–28

Luke 5:12–16

Luke 5:17–26

- *What types of ailments did Jesus heal?*
- *What was required in order for Jesus to heal a person?*
- *How were other people involved in these healing stories?*



What Healing Ministry Did Jesus Leave the Church?

Healing was also essential to the mission of the apostles: "[Jesus] summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two....They anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them" (Mark 6:7, 13).

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the Church continued to be a sacrament of healing. In the Letter of James, we read: "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" (James 5:14–15).

The sacrament of the **anointing of the sick** is based on Jesus' concern for the sick, his commissioning the apostles to heal the sick, and the healing ministry of the early Church.

Faith in God's Care

To fully celebrate the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, it helps to recognize the following points:

Anointing Is a Community Celebration

The *Catechism* states that when the sick are anointed, they should be "assisted by their pastor and the whole ecclesial community, which is invited to surround the sick in a special way through their prayers and fraternal attention" (CCC 1516) and "Like all the sacraments the Anointing of the Sick is a liturgical and communal celebration....It is very fitting to celebrate it within the Eucharist" (CCC 1517).

A person doesn't have to wait to celebrate the sacrament until an illness is so grave that he or she is in the hospital. This sacrament, like all the sacraments, is a community celebration. When possible, celebrating it in the context of parish, home, or family is encouraged. The sick person has a better opportunity to appreciate the prayers and symbols of the rite when in her or his worshipping community.

Anyone who is hospitalized or homebound can receive the sacrament of the anointing of the sick as well. When possible, family, friends, or representatives of the parish community may be present.

Sickness Involves More Than Bodily Illness

Tensions, fear, and anxiety about the future affect not only our minds but also our bodies. These illnesses can be serious. They can move us to ask for the healing touch of Christ in the sacrament of anointing.

Persons suffering from addictions can be anointed as can those who suffer from mental illness. Christ's power can be invoked in the sacrament when anxiety precedes surgery. The spouse or principal caregiver of an ill person may be anointed when he or she, too, is seriously affected by the illness.

Anointing Heals Us Through Faith

Does it work? Will I experience healing? Yes, healing always takes place. However, that healing isn't restricted to mere physical healing.

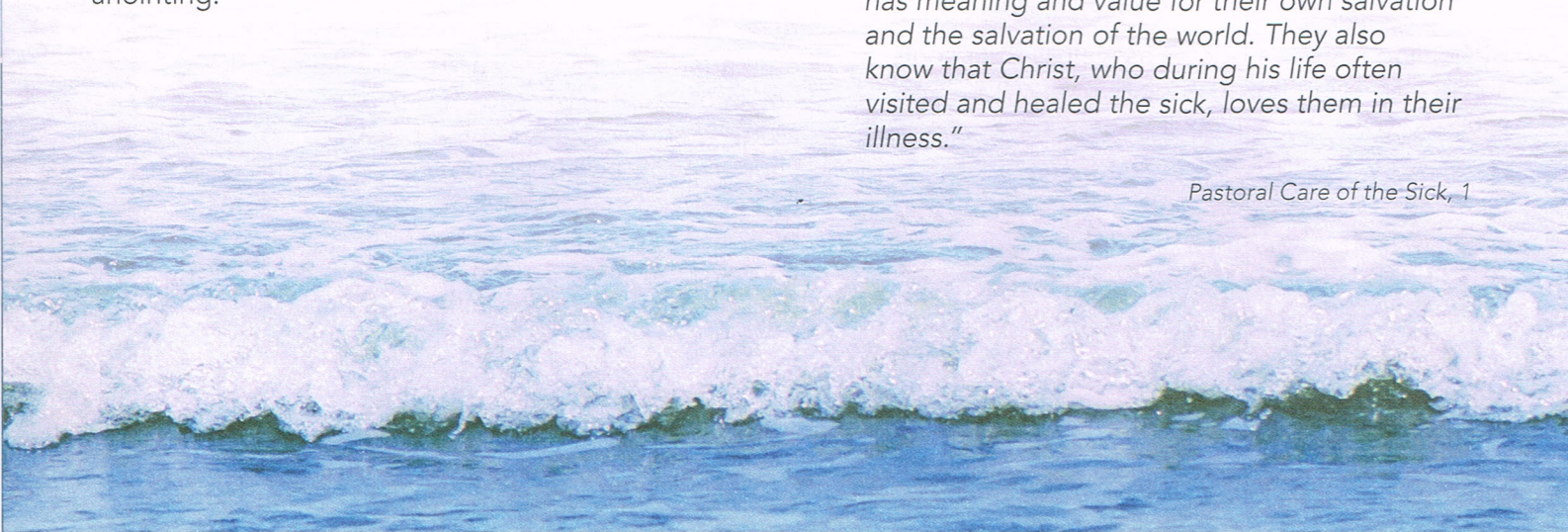
When our attention is directed toward physical illness, it's natural to think of the effects of the sacrament in terms of physical healing. Sacraments, however, are celebrations of faith, expressions of who we are before God.

The healing following the anointing of the sick is a different kind of healing than a medicinal treatment or surgical intervention. Sacraments are acts of faith; they grace the whole person—body, soul, and spirit. The blessing over the oil for anointing asks God to "send the power of your Holy Spirit, the Consoler, into this precious oil....Make this oil a remedy for all who are anointed with it; heal them in body, in soul, and in spirit, and deliver them from every affliction" (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*, 123). The sick person may or may not experience physical healing, but he or she is strengthened spiritually in time of need. Reassurance of God's care and that of the community brings comfort and peace to the ailing and anxious.

Value in Suffering

"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 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



In this sacrament, we pray that the sick be healed in body, soul, and spirit. God alone knows what kind of healing the sick need most: healing a wound, converting fear into courage, lessening loneliness, turning confusion into insight.

The sacrament of anointing helps us gain insight into the meaning of human suffering. While it doesn't remove the mystery of human suffering, its celebration gives us a window into the mystery of a loving God who raises up the crucified Son to display his victorious wounds, sitting triumphant at the Father's right hand.

The *laying on of hands*, an ancient Christian gesture, symbolizes and confers the special grace of the Holy Spirit.

The priest *anoints* the forehead and hands of the sick person with the *oil of the sick*. The forehead is anointed as a reminder of the sign of the cross traced on the forehead at baptism. As the priest anoints the forehead, he says, "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit."

The anointing of the hands signifies the Holy Spirit meeting us in our personal situation. As the hands are anointed, the priest prays, "May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up." The person answers, "Amen."

- When have you been healed physically, spiritually, or emotionally?
- How did your healing come about?
- What did you learn from your experience of suffering?



How Often Can Someone Be Anointed?

Some need this sacramental grace to sustain them at a psychological or emotional level. Some need grace for an actual cure. Others, because of the extreme nature of the illness, need the grace to enter more deeply into the suffering of Christ.

This sacrament can be requested any time a person has an illness that might lead to death, is facing surgery, suffering the ailments of advanced age, or entering a new phase of illness. It's not unusual for a person to celebrate this sacrament more than once.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), anointing of the sick was used mostly for those close to death. The council restored this sacrament to its original purpose, changing its name from *extreme unction* (final anointing) to *anointing of the sick*.


How Is the Anointing of the Sick Celebrated Today?

Since this sacrament focuses on the healing of body, spirit, and soul, those who will be anointed are encouraged to celebrate the other sacrament of healing—the sacrament of penance and reconciliation—prior to the anointing service. The rite of anointing may be celebrated within Mass or outside of Mass with a Liturgy of the Word that instructs those gathered on the deeper Christian meaning of sickness and suffering and to celebrate the sacrament in renewed faith.



How Can I Participate in Christ's Healing Ministry?

While priests are the only ones who can sacramentally anoint the sick, ministry to the sick is a concern of the entire Christian community. Talk to a Catholic health-care professional, a hospital or hospice chaplain, a member of your parish who takes Communion to the sick and homebound, or someone who visits the sick in nursing homes. Ask them about their ministry and how it addresses the total person—body, soul, and spirit.



Find out how your local parish supports its sick members through service and prayer. Then answer the following questions in your journal:

- *How is God calling me to join in his care of the sick in my community?*
- *Who do I personally know who may benefit from a visit, card, or meal? Commit to reaching out to this person in the coming week.*

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