

Thoughts from the Second Floor Front
The VII Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 24, 2019
Anointing of the Sick – Part I
One of the Sacraments of Healing

Along with Reconciliation, the Sacrament of the Sick is one of the Sacraments of Healing in the Church. In hospital ministry one is regularly celebrated with the other. Jesus healed throughout the Public Ministry; there are numerous examples of His Healing Miracles: the cure of the Ten Lepers, the hemorrhaging woman, Jairus' daughter, the man born blind, the man at the pool of Bethsaida, just to name a few. He always associated a physical healing with a spiritual healing as well. To the hemorrhaging woman He said: ... *Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction.* (Mk 5:34) He did not simplify the matter by saying her faith has healed her. Jesus wants wellbeing for us; eternal wellbeing. In addition, when the Twelve were sent out on Mission, they anointed people with oil resulting in their healing. In the ancient world, and in our own time, oil has been used as a means of healing.

While the Sacrament of the Sick, as all of them do, has its origins in Jesus (Recall the definition of a sacrament: an outward sign, instituted by Christ to give grace.) a powerful scriptural reference to the sacrament as existing in the earliest days of the church is found in the Letter of James.

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)

So that the Sacrament of the Sick has existed from the beginning of the Church, ratifying the definition of a sacrament, is in evidence through the Letter of James. As with the liturgical celebrations surrounding the other sacraments, the historical development of this sacrament has shifted throughout the centuries. In the Public Ministry, Jesus anointed people and He himself was anointed. He did not always use oil, but His healing was often accompanied by an anointing. Thus, in the beginning of the life of the church the practice of celebrating the Sacrament of the Sick was more consistent with the intention that Jesus manifested in the Public Ministry; the sacrament was for the ill not exclusively for the dying.

While the Church has been consistent in the use of the sacrament, the main development throughout the history of the church is the movement where the sacrament was initially celebrated when someone was ill. Over time it became the immediate preparation for death. However, if you read the liturgy of the anointing of the Sick you will clearly see the emphasis is on restoration of the person, physically as well as spiritually. Therefore, it is a good idea and a sound spiritual practice, to be anointed before surgery. Not in case you die on the table, but to help you regain your health with the aid of surgeons, nurses, technicians and a whole host of hospital personnel.

Next week I will comment on the manner in which people had, and sadly still do, gotten the meaning and purpose of the sacrament twisted. Realize that Jesus has a deeply personal interest in our wellbeing, now and forever, and He offers us the Grace necessary to be with Him and be healed through Him.

Faithfully,

Msgr. Diamond