

Thoughts from the Second Floor Front
The VIII Sunday in Ordinary Time
March 3, 2019
Anointing of the Sick - Part II
One of the Sacraments of Healing

For a time, and even now, it is fixed in people's minds, that the Sacrament of the Sick is Extreme Unction; as it was one time known, the final anointing. We were anointed at our Baptism and Confirmation, thus being consecrated within the sacramental ritual. And we are anointed when ill. Even now it is incorrectly referred to as the Last Rites. The Last Rites are not given to you on your death bed. The Last Rites is the graveside service at the time of internment. This misunderstanding of the Sacrament of the Sick has led to drama, both fictional and historical. In motion pictures when a priest is called for it serves as a dramatic technique to heighten tension. The famous moment when a priest was called to Parkland Hospital in Dallas to attend to President Kennedy; it was presumed across the nation, that the reason was he was in *periculo mortis* – danger of death. I have anointed people as they were being wheeled into the operating room and I fully realize the importance of the moment as do the hospital staff who recognize the spiritual reality of what is occurring.

However, the usual manner of celebrating the Sacrament of the Sick, is in a hospital room or someone's home. I have frequently anointed people after Mass if they are about to undergo a medical procedure. Like all Sacraments, The Sacrament of the Sick is for the living. It is not the immediate preparation for death; although there are prayers that can be offered if the person is actively dying. Jesus is present in a unique way in the celebration of the Sacrament of the Sick.

The manner in which the Sacrament is celebrated, as with other sacramental celebrations, has changed through the centuries. The Eastern Church required a number of priests to be present for the anointing: three, five or seven; and the priest blesses the oil to be used. But in an emergency, one is sufficient. In the West, our tradition has required only one and the oil has already been consecrated.

Each sacrament is composed of matter and form. The matter in the Sacrament of the Sick is the consecrated oil. In a beautiful symbol of sacramental unity, the Oil of the Sick is consecrated by the Bishop at the Annual Chrism Mass. At this Mass celebrated on Thursday of Holy Week, the oils (Chrism, Oil of Catechumens and the Oil of the Sick) to be used in parishes throughout the coming year are blessed. Deacons and priests attending the Chrism Mass then return home with the newly consecrated oil. If you are able to join us on Holy Thursday, the sight of a filled Cathedral and the experience of a powerful liturgical celebration is a great way to mark the beginning of the Triduum. Getting into Center City Philadelphia can be more than a wee bit of a hassle; but think about it; it's Lent, sacrifice (and a bit of suffering) is what we are to be about.

Finally, the form of the sacrament. Words are very important. The words the church uses to celebrate the sacrament are to most perfectly reflect what it is we believe and what it is we are celebrating. The teaching is: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Loosely translated (my Latin was never very good) it means: the law that is prayed is the law that is believed. Our faith is all about transformation. Transformation from an ordinary life to the life of a disciple. Transformation from being a sinner to becoming a saint. Transformation from darkness to light. Transformation from the flawed, feeble and fallible beings we are to something made glorious. Transformation from sickness to health. Transformation from illness to well-being; eternal well-being.

You will notice that the words of the Sacrament of the Sick, the Form of the Sacrament, are directed for healing:

*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, save you and raise you up.
Amen*

Through devout celebrations of the sacraments may we be made well – now and forever.

Faithfully,

Msgr. Diamond