

Anointing of the Sick

1. New Testament

- Jesus heals sick.
- Mark 6:13 -- Jesus sends out apostles, to anoint sick with oil to cure
- James 5:14-15 -- see box

“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

2. Early Christianity – Healing of the Whole Person

- Custom to anoint sick with oil, along with prayer & touch -- laying on hands.
- Continue Jesus’ care for the sick.
 - For whom: Christians who were sick.
 - Purpose: to heal the whole person: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual.
 - Who anointed: Bishop, priest, deacon, any baptized person. Often family member, often women.
- Where anointed: Anoint on neck or chest or between shoulders; or where pain was greatest.
- Ancient world: oil associated with healing (like ointment for burns, topical pain relief, etc).
 - Note: not chrism – chrism associated with bathing; oil of catechumens for strength, avoid evil.
- Oil for sick. Care for dying? Viaticum, communion. Via = “way,” tecum = “with you.” Food for journey.
- Custom of anointing sick for healing remains through 8th century.

3. Middle Ages – Transition to Heaven

- 8th to 13th c. Intertwined with repeatable private confession; with deathbed initiation, penance.
 - Less about holistic healing, becomes only about spiritual healing = absolution of sins.
 - Like private confession to a priest, priest becomes only person who may anoint.
- Develops into rite for dying, to usher into heaven.
- Acquires a name: “Extreme Unction.” Latin “in extremis” = dying. “Unction” = oil, anointing.
- Practice: comes to be done for dying with two other sacraments, confession and viaticum.
 - These three sacraments = “Last rites.” Viaticum remained last for a while, then Extreme Unction last.
- When list of 7 sac. is accepted 12th c., this sacrament is Extreme Unction, no longer for healing sick.

5. Middle Ages to 20th century

- Huge shift from early Church
 - For whom: dying -- at point of death, as close to moment of death as possible.
 - Purpose: to forgive sins, so can go to heaven. Transition to afterlife.
 - Who anointed: priest.
 - Where anointed: senses. For sins committed by sight, hearing, touch, etc.
 - Senses: Evolved from catechumenate, deathbed; part of public penance.
- Priest gives “last rites” to dying person. No one else present, for confession.
- Theologians struggle to distinguish sins forgiven by Extreme Unction vs confession. Effects of sin.



6. Vatican Council II – Recover the Early Tradition

“Extreme unction,” which may also and **more fittingly be called “anointing of the sick,”** is **not** a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death.

“Hence, as soon as any one of the faithful **begins** to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has **certainly already** arrived.”

7. Anointing of the Sick

- Ritual is in a book, *Pastoral Care of the Sick*. Part I Care of the **Sick**. Part II Care of the **Dying**.
- **Anointing is in Part I**, NOT in Part II.
 - I. Care of the Sick: Visit the Sick, Visit Sick Child, Communion of the Sick, Anointing of the Sick
 - II. Care of the Dying: Viaticum, Commendation of Dying, Prayers for Dead, Exceptional Circumstances.
- Sacrament of Anointing is placed In context of whole community's care for sick.
- Note: what used to be known as "Last Rites" is not to be done, except in "exceptional circumstances."
- Sacrament for the **Dying = Viaticum**.

8. Pastoral Care of the Sick - Introduction

- Sickness -- "Christians feel and experience pain as do all other people." PCS 1
 - "We should fight strenuously against all sickness and carefully seek the blessings of good health, so that we may fulfill our role in human society and in the Church." PCS 3
 - "[S]ickness cannot as a general rule be regarded as a punishment ... for personal sins." PCS 2
- Christ continues to heal the sick. And "Christ is still pained and tormented in his members." PCS 1-2
 - "Christ, who during his life often visited and healed the sick, loves them in their illness." PCS 1
- For seriously ill. "Seriously impaired by sickness or old age." Surgery, mental illness. Over age 7. PCS 8
- Gives grace of Holy Spirit for healing of whole person: mental, emotional, spiritual, maybe physical PCS 5-6
 - So anoint at the **beginning of illness**, to give strength and healing
 - To **delay is "abuse."** Do while the sick person is capable of active participation. PCS 98
- May be **repeated**, during same illness if worsens, or in another illness later. PCS 9, 102
- Priest is minister. New formula, from James. Anoint forehead and hands or other part. PCS 16, 25, 23

9. Act of Christ through the Church

- "In the rites for the sick, **it is the people of God who pray** in faith. The entire Church is made present in this community --represented by at least the priest, family, friends, and others assembled to pray for those to be anointed." 105
- "Because of its very nature as a **sign**, the sacrament of the anointing of the sick should be celebrated with **members of the family and other representatives of the Christian community whenever this is possible**. Then the sacrament is seen for what it is -- a part of the **prayer of the Church** and an **encounter with the Lord**. The sign of the sacrament will be further enhanced by **avoiding undue haste** in prayer and action." PCS 99
- "What happens to **one member affects all**. The sacrament of anointing effectively expresses the share that each one has in the sufferings of others." "If **one member suffers** in the Body of Christ, which is the Church, **all the members suffer with** that member." PCS 98, 32
- Priest represents both Christ and the Church
 - "When the priest anoints the sick, he is anointing in the name and with the power **of Christ** himself."
 - "On behalf of the **whole community**, he is ministering to those members who are suffering." PCS 98

"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."

10. Preparation and Participation

- Priest "should become acquainted with the family, friends, and others who may be present. The sick person and others may help to **plan the celebration**, for example, by choosing the readings and prayers. It will be especially helpful if the sick person, the priest, and family become **accustomed to praying together**." PCS 100
- "There should be opportunity for **suitable preparation over a period of time** for the benefit of the sick themselves and of those who are with them." PCS 98
- Also prays for **caregivers**: "This message of hope and comfort is also needed by those who care for the sick, especially those who are closely bound in love to them." PCS 98

