



James

The Anointing of the Sick

History of the Early World	Patriarchs	Israel in Egypt	Conquest of Canaan	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom Exile	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Jesus the Messiah	Church
----------------------------	------------	-----------------	--------------------	--------	----------------	-----------------------	-------	--------	------------------	-------------------	--------



Introduction

In this lesson, James addresses those who are suffering both emotionally and physically. The deep sadness that often results from suffering can be used as a tool in the hands of the devil to bring on despair. James teaches that the proper response to suffering, or what can be interpreted as sadness, is to pray. As natural as praise comes forth from the cheerful, prayer should come forth from those who suffer sadness.

Here James also promulgates what our Lord instituted (Mark 6:13) as a true and proper sacrament of the New Testament, the Anointing of the Sick. This sacrament is intended to provide grace which strengthens and increases the sick persons courage and resistance. "The Council of Trent, in commenting on the text of James, says that this sacrament confers a grace of the Holy Spirit, whose internal anointing, on the one hand, frees the sick person's soul from sin and the remnants of sin, and on the other hand, gives him relief and strength, inspiring in him great trust in the merciful goodness of God" (John Paul II, General Audience 4/29/92). Sometimes the sacrament brings physical healing.

Ordained clergy are the administrators of this sacrament, however laypeople still have the privilege of praying for the sick outside of the sacrament. While the prayers of laypeople for the sick do not confer the effects of the sacrament, God can move in a powerful way through people who trust in him for healing.



James 5:13-15

13 Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. **14** Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; **15** and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

Have you ever...

1. Have you ever wondered if God still heals today?
2. Have you ever wanted to pray for the sick, but didn't know what to do?
3. Have you ever wondered why oil is used to anoint people?





Catholic Scripture Study



Questions on the Text

Homework

1. When you are feeling sad how do you typically respond? Are you stuck in any particular patterns?
2. We are all going to die someday. When you come upon that time of passing over to your heavenly home, what would you hope others would do for you to bring comfort and peace?
3. Pope John Paul II says, "The traditional term for this sacrament was "extreme unction", because it was considered to be the sacrament of the dying. Vatican II no longer used this expression, so the Anointing could be better seen as the sacrament of the seriously ill, which it is. Therefore, it is not right to wait until the last moment to ask for this sacrament and thus deprive the sick person of the help which the Anointing gives the soul, and sometimes even the body. The relatives and friends of the sick person must, at the proper time, express his desire to receive the sacrament in the case of serious illness. This desire is to be presumed, unless it was rejected, even when the sick person is no longer able to express it formally (General Audience 4/29/92). Do you know of anyone currently in a hospital or under hospice care that would benefit from a visit from a priest for the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick?
4. Outside of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, lay people have the freedom to pray for the sick. What obstacles stand in the way from you praying for the sick and what can you do to overcome them?
5. In order to become more familiar with the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, meet with your local priest to discuss how he goes about administering the sacrament. Ask him when he should be called when you encounter those who are seriously ill. This meeting should be geared toward developing a better working relationship with your parish priest and to gain a deeper understanding of the sacrament. Also, let your priest know how much you appreciate his ministry.



Questions for Reflection

1. James 5:13 urges us to not only pray when we're suffering and to seek the sacrament of anointing when we're sick, it tells us to "sing praise" when we're cheerful. So often, we only think about God during difficult times. James reminds us to think about him when things are going well. Is it more difficult to remember God in good times than in bad? What practical steps can we take to remember the Lord in our prosperity?
2. Have you or anyone you know received the sacrament of Anointing described in James 5:14-15? What effects resulted from that sacrament?
3. Although physical healing can be an effect of the sacrament of Anointing, James does not promise this. The only effects of the sacrament that are guaranteed are participation in the resurrection, and forgiveness of sins. Why do you think the healing of the body is merely secondary in the effects of the sacrament?





Questions for Reflection (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

4. The Church teaches that only priests can give the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, using oil blessed by the bishop (CCC No. 1530). With this understanding, what practical steps can we take to fulfill James' command to "pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16)? In what ways is prayer for healing among lay Catholics distinct from the sacrament of Anointing? Why is it nonetheless vital to the health of the Church? What are some ways that you can actually pray for the sick?

5. According to the *Catechism* (No. 1532) there are five effects of the Anointing of the Sick.

- 1) The uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church;
- 2) The strengthening, peace, and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age;
- 3) The forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of Penance;
- 4) The restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul;
- 5) The preparation for passing over to eternal life."

Briefly discuss each effect and based on your findings reflect on whether you have previously understood accurately the beauty of this sacrament. How will your life change as a result of understanding its effects? How does ministry to the elderly take on new significance with a proper understanding of this sacrament?

6. The Church teaches (CCC No. 1499) that when the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is administered, the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, that he may raise them up and save them. In addition, she exhorts them to contribute to the good of the people of God by freely uniting themselves to the Passion and death of Christ. [Rom. 8:17; Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Peter 4:13.] How does this sacrament help make sense out of suffering?

7. This sacrament can be administered each time a Christian falls seriously ill, and if the person's illness worsens (CCC No. 1529). The fact that Christians can receive this sacrament more than once speaks of ongoing attention and care on behalf of the Church. What can your parish do to better educate people about this sacrament, and what can your parish do to develop a good working relationship with your pastor?



Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder

Sacramental Aspects of Anointing

James 5:13-16 speaks of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. We receive an anointing at our Baptism which initiates us into the life of the Blessed Trinity. That supernatural life, like natural life, is something we constantly grow in just as Jesus himself "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). That is why we receive the further sacrament of Confirmation, which is the sacrament of maturity. It is also why we make the sign of the cross with holy water: that is, we constantly renew our baptismal covenant. The Anointing of the Sick, then, embodies an added dimension to our baptism in that we are healed, not only of original sin, but also of all the effects of original sin including illness and death. On the other hand, as James points out in the beginning of this letter, the Christian life is not pain free and the sacrament of Anointing is not, therefore, to be





Catholic Scripture Study



Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

understood as a vending machine guaranteeing physical healing. Physical healing is but one possible effect of the sacrament. For James, the greatest sickness is not cancer or heart disease, but sin. If we fear offending God, then we should dread sin more than suffering. Indeed, as James has pointed out in the first chapter, suffering and trials can be means (sometimes the principal means) of God's grace to us. For only through suffering do we really sacrifice our will to God's will. Only by giving up all the goods less important than God can we ultimately unite our will to God's. Not surprisingly then, the only effects of the sacrament of Anointing that are guaranteed by James are the forgiveness of sin and the resurrection (James 5:15). This is not to say that physical healing cannot proceed from the sacrament. But all such healing has in view the final healing of our soul's salvation.

Oils

The Greek word we translate as "anointing" is *alēiphō*, and derives from the term for "oil". In the Old Testament, oil carries several connotations. It speaks of richness. One of the Old Testament images for overflowing bounty is abundance of oil (Psalm 45:7; Jeremiah 31:12). To be able to produce a lot of oil required ownership of a lot of land, since oil derived from olive trees and land ownership was wealth. In addition, oil images *healing* since it was used to dress wounds (Luke 10:34). Further, oil indicates *chosenness*. Thus, priests and kings such as Aaron or David are anointed when they are called by God (Leviticus 8:12; 1 Samuel 16:13). And not just a little dab of oil: great quantities were used in anointing. It was poured over the head, not just dabbed on. Its use in anointing was lavish, extravagant and *exultant*. This brings us to a fourth connotation of oil: namely, that *it is a sign of joy and celebration*. Hence, Psalm 133, exulting in a period of unity and peace in Israel's history, rejoices by saying that unity "is like the precious oil upon the head,/running down upon the beard,/upon the beard of Aaron,/running down on the collar of his robes!" In a world where tribal warfare, quarrelling and petty strife were pretty much daily realities (and have remained so for thousands of years), the biblical writer can think of no more perfect image for the rare jewel of peace and concord than oil. Understandably then, God chooses oil as the symbol for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Israel comes to look for the coming of the "anointed one" or "Messiah" (which is translated "Christ" in Greek and "Christ" in English). And when he comes, he in turn pours out the Holy Spirit on his church and, through his apostles, inaugurates the sacrament of Anointing for his chosen ones that they may too experienced his riches of mercy, peace and healing by the power of the same Spirit.

Lay Prayer for the Sick

The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is reserved for the "elders" in James (that is, those who have received the sacrament of holy orders — called *prēsbūtērūs* or, as we say in English "priests"). Nonetheless, the laity share in the honor and duty of prayer for the sick as well. This is why, in addition to seeking the sacrament of anointing, it is perfectly acceptable to seek the charisms of intercession or healing at work in laypeople. Such charisms are given, not through the sacrament of Holy Orders, but through Baptism, so that certain laypeople can be and are used by the Holy Spirit in a special way to heal either through supernatural means such as prayer, or through natural means such as medicine. In addition, we should seek (and continue to offer) prayers for the healing of others and ourselves as much as we can. James illustrates this with the example of Elijah and reminds us that the prayer of a "righteous man" avails much. On the other hand, it is important to also remember the following two things.





Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

First, with respect to use of charisms: much harm has been done by people who attempt to claim charisms (usually spectacular ones like miraculous healing) without subjecting their claims to the judgment of the Church. The Church counsels us (CCC No. 801) to therefore subject our claims of charisms to the judgment of the Church so as to avoid acting as “Lone Ranger” Christians and disturbing the faith of others or ourselves by claims we cannot back up with fact.

Second, remember that all prayer for healing is request and requests are sometimes refused, as Paul notes in 2 Corinthians 12 and Jesus demonstrates by his refused plea to “let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:39).

But above all, laypeople are called to use all the gifts at their disposal to pray for one another for healing as for all other things. As Paul says, “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). And as the Catholic Catechism adds (No. 910): “The laity can also feel called, or be in fact called, to cooperate with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community, for the sake of its growth and life. This can be done through the exercise of different kinds of ministries according to the grace and charisms which the Lord has been pleased to bestow on them.”

Catechism Connection

Referenced from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

No. 1294 "The anointing of the sick expresses healing and comfort."

No. 1421 "The two sacraments of healing: the sacrament of penance and the sacrament of anointing of the sick."

No. 1503 "Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have need of."

No. 1499 "By the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of the priests the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, that he may raise them up and save them."

Family Devotions

The Church teaches us (CCC No. 1517) that "the anointing of the sick is a liturgical and communal celebration, whether it takes place in the family home, hospital or church, for a single sick person or a whole group of sick persons. It is fitting to celebrate it within the Eucharist, the memorial of the Lord's Passover. If circumstances suggest it, the celebration of the sacrament can be preceded by the sacrament of Penance and followed by the sacrament of the Eucharist. As the sacrament of Christ's Passover the Eucharist should always be the last sacrament of the earthly journey, the 'viaticum' for 'passing over' to eternal life."

Rome to Home

A papal quote relating to the lesson:

"The reality of the priestly community can be said to be fulfilled and revealed in a particularly meaningful way in the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, about which St. James wrote (James 5:14-15)....As we see, the Letter of James recommends initiative on the part of the sick person who, personally or through his loved ones, asks for the priests to come. It could be said that the common priesthood is already being exercised here in a personal act of participating in the community of life enjoyed by the 'Saints', that is, by those who have been consecrated in the Holy Spirit whose anointing is sought" (Pope John Paul II, General Audience 4/29/920.)





In this lesson, we observed that:

In the journey from cradle to grave, God blesses us with sacraments along the way. Sacraments are substantive encounters with Christ where we receive grace (the life of the Trinity) to live and die. "Just as the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist form a unity called 'the sacraments of Christian initiation,' so too it can be said that Penance, The Anointing of the Sick and the Eucharist as viaticum constitute at the end of Christian life 'the sacraments that prepare for our heavenly homeland' or the sacraments that complete the earthly pilgrimage" (CCC No. 1525).

Baptism began the process of conforming us to the death and resurrection of Christ. The Anointing of the Sick completes the series of holy anointings that mark the whole Christian life. Baptism sealed the new life in us; confirmation strengthened us for the combat of this life. This last anointing "fortifies the end of our earthly life like a solid rampart for the final struggles before entering the Father's house" (CCC No. 1523). From birth to death, we are cared for by our heavenly Father.

A Message from the Authors

Are you enjoying our study? Would you like this important service to continue? If so, please be aware that Catholic Exchange is a non-profit charitable organization totally dependent on your financial support to maintain both our website and our groundbreaking Catholic Scripture Study. So please make an on-line donation with your credit card at www.catholicexchange.com, call 1-888-477-1982, or mail as generous a donation as possible to:

Catholic Exchange
P.O. Box 231820
Encinitas, CA 92023

Thank you for making the Word of God available to anyone who wants it anywhere in the world.
God Bless,

Scott, Jeff, Mark and Gayle

