

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

Anointing of the Sick - A Little Dab'll Do Ya

Last week, we talked about the first of the Sacraments of Healing, the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Today, we take healing to a whole new level, or really a whole bunch of new levels. This week, we will discuss the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.

This Sacrament is perhaps the one that causes the most confusion. Some of the confusion comes from the practice of the Sacrament in times past. The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick used to be known as Extreme Unction, which basically considers this Sacrament a final blessing. Under this title, one can imagine that it was reserved only for those who were near death. Even today, people are often scared when a priest enters their hospital room. I remember one man, turning ghostly pale and saying to me as I came to offer the Sacrament of Anointing, "Is it THAT bad Father?"

Well, since Vatican II, we have come to a better understanding of all of our Sacraments, including the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] states the Sacrament's purpose this way: "The Anointing of the Sick 'is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as anyone 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.'" [CCC 1514] Indeed, the time to receive this Sacrament often arrives earlier than this too. It is now common and advisable for people to ask for and receive the Sacrament of Anointing before surgery or during any serious physical, spiritual,

psychological, or emotional illness, even if these would most likely **not** result in death. Also, this Sacrament can be received multiple times during a person's life, or even during the same illness.

Jesus Himself instituted this Sacrament and it follows the very example He left for us. There are so many examples of Jesus healing the sick, and He often did so with a corresponding forgiveness of sins. One might think of the story of the paralyzed man who was lowered down through a roof to Jesus' feet. Jesus first forgave the man's sins and then cured him. [See Mark 2:1-12] Today the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick allows for the same effects, healing of body and soul. The Rite begins with the following words: "Lord God, you have said to us through your apostle James: 'Are there people sick among you? Let them send for the priests of the Church, and let the priests pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick persons, and the Lord will raise them up. If they have committed any sins, their sins will be forgiven them.'" [Rite of Anointing of the Sick]

One caution should be realized. While healing always results from this Sacrament when people have faith in the work of Jesus through the Sacrament, there is not always physical cure. Sometimes, for sure, the sick person is cured physically, but sometimes the healing is spiritual, emotional, psychological, or relational – all of which are also important and beneficial to the sick person and those close to her.

Next week, we will begin our discussion of the Sacraments of Vocation with the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

