

Introduction

Illness and suffering are among the greatest trials we endure in our lives. Very grave sickness in particular makes us glimpse death. Such experiences can be difficult to cope with. Perplexed by sudden illness human beings can sometimes revolt against God. However, for others – and we hope for us in our parish community – such an experience can result in us discerning what is truly important in life. As a consequence we rededicate ourselves, or in some cases we return, to God.

In his earthly ministry Jesus showed compassion for the sick and performed numerous miraculous healings. Our Lord asked those who approached him seeking a cure to believe. He often used touch to effect healing. So too in the sacraments we are touched by Christ. The healings by Jesus were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, the radical healing of Jesus came in the victory over sin and death through the Passover. By his Passion and death on the cross Jesus gave new meaning to suffering. Consequently, if we unite our suffering to his it can become a means of purification and grace for us and others.

His compassion toward all who suffer goes so far that he identifies himself with them: "I was sick and you visited me." His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul. It is the source of tireless efforts to comfort them.
[Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1503]

In entrusting the Twelve apostles with a mission Jesus commanded them to – "Heal the sick" (Matthew 10:8). His Church has borne witness to this instruction by taking care of the sick as well as accompanying them with prayer of intercession. There is a specific sacrament for the sick, instituted by Christ and referred to by St. James in the opening passage of Scripture cited previously.

Anyone who is in danger of death from sickness or old age can receive the sacrament. It may be repeated in the event of a subsequent grave illness or if in the course of an illness deterioration occurs making death more likely. The sacrament should be preceded, if possible, by the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. The faithful should encourage recourse to the Anointing of the Sick when appropriate.

The sacrament is administered by the priest by the anointing with oil on the forehead and hands of the sick person. This is accompanied by prayer imploring the conferral of special grace upon the recipient.

What are the effects of this sacrament?

– The uniting of the sick person to the Passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church.

– The strengthening, peace and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age.

– The forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of Penance.

– The restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of the person's soul.

– The preparation for passing over to eternal life.

Viaticum

In addition to the Anointing of the Sick, the Church offers the Eucharist to those who are about to depart this life. It is the sacrament of passing over from death to life, from this world to the Father. It is appropriate since having received the three – sacraments of initiation – the Christian now obtains Penance, Anointing of the Sick and Eucharist as viaticum as – sacraments that prepare us for our heavenly homeland –.