

## **The Sacrament of Unction**

There are several times that the anointing with oil may occur.

Extreme Unction is done at the time of death or one nearing death, when the Priest will anoint the five senses (hearing, touch, sight, smell, taste) praying total absolution for all sins committed by the use of these senses, and final commitment of the person into the hands of a merciful Savior.

The more frequent and most normal practice of Unction is that of anointing the sick with Holy Oil that is blessed by the Bishop but under circumstances where the Bishop may be unavailable, the Priest may bless the oil. Some rubrics call for several priests together blessing the oil in the absence of a Bishop.

The significance of Oil is scriptural. Olive oil was used in the Old Testament for the anointing of priests, kings and prophets. The oil was symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Jesus sent out followers with instructions to anoint with oil. In the early Church according to the epistle of James, anointing with oil was medicinal and was accompanied with the forgiveness of sins when administered by the elders of the Church.

Add to the symbolic meaning there is also a healing component in olive oil. Consuming extra virgin olive oil is a regular part of the Mediterranean's diet. On several occasions I have poured into an open wound the consecrated Holy Oil and within twenty-four hours a noticeable healing occurs. On one mission outreach in Burma I fell into a concrete sewage draining ditch and suffered an injury with a three inch long gash in my leg. The only thing I had to use on the wound was a small amount of betadine and Holy Oil. I washed the wound with the betadine solution and poured in Holy Oil covering the wound with a bandage. Several days later when I was able to get medical attention, the physician was surprised by the wound healing and void of any infection. Both the healing component in the oil and the intentional prayers in the blessing of the oil may be credited for the healings. God uses natural and simple things in His merciful care of the saints.

There are various ways in which the anointing may occur.

The most ordinary is to make the sign of the Cross with the Holy Oil on the forehead of the sick person using the words "in the name of Jesus" or the Blessed Trinity - "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". There may be one or three applications of the oil with the sign of the Cross. The words used are at the discretion of the administering clergyman, but I more frequently use the reference to Jesus because of the recommended formula in James 5: 13-16.

In some cases an anointing of the hands as well as the forehead may be done. In the anointing of the open hands the implication is the sick person's openness and acceptance to what God wishes to give in His healing. The more ways in which the sick person can be involved in the praying and anointing, the more effective is the sacrament. James'

instruction for the sick person to call for the elders is an important first step. I have known people ready to go to hospital for major surgery and never ask for this sacrament prior to hospitalization. They would never practice this kind of silence in going to the physician; why neglect the spiritual side to healing? One of my greatest privileges and joys in pastoral ministry was to be asked to give the sacrament of Unction.

A more direct method of anointing, when possible, is to anoint the area of sickness. If the prayer request involves a broken limb and it is convenient to anoint the very area of breakage, then do so. Anointing the eyelids for an eye problem, or the ear for a hearing problem, are examples of this more direct method. Discretion must be employed.

Before anointing wait patiently for a few moments for the Holy Spirit to give a “word of knowledge” if He knows something that you do not know about the person. On one occasion I was ready to anoint and pray for a lady who attended one of our services. She claimed she had a painful neck and asked for prayer. As I prepared to anoint and pray for her, the Holy Spirit spoke to me and said, “ask her about her husband”. I did not know the lady; she was not a member of the church where I was Rector, but I noticed she had on wedding rings and felt confident to ask her. She began to tell me all the hateful things he had done. I had opened a can of worms and sort to counsel her by telling her she needed to forgive him as Jesus forgave her. It was a few moments of struggle convincing her but at last she began to weep and pray aloud for God to forgive her of her judgment against her husband. I pronounced absolution and told her I would now anoint her and pray for her painful neck. To my surprise she looked at me and said, “it doesn’t hurt any more”. The husband was a pain in her neck. I could have prayed for her and perhaps she would have received a momentary healing but I am confident when she returned home and saw him, the pain would have returned. Symptoms can be removed by healing the root cause.

Along with the anointing with oil, the laying-on-of-hands may also be employed. On occasion when I have prayed for people with back problems I will have someone to lay hands on the area of the problem while I anoint the forehead with oil. The same may be done for a stomach ailment. Women should be invited to lay on hands when praying for other women, and the same for men in praying for men.

I have been asked if the anointing of the sick is a one time matter or can this sacrament be repeated. My response is that as long as the sickness manifests itself, anointing may be done. When the physician prescribes a medicine I do not take one pill and then stop but I continue taking the medicine until the healing manifests itself. If repeated anointing is done and no healing is evidenced, perhaps some personal counseling with the sick one needs to be done to determine what may be blocking the healing. When unforgiveness, resentment, anger or other emotional issues are present in the person’s life, these things can cause a blockage to healing and a spiritual healing must occur before the physical can be obtained.

## **THE BLESSING OF THE OIL OF THE SICK (Unction)**

*(The blessing of the oil for the sick is usually done in the context of the Eucharist, inserting it near the end of the Consecration of the Bread and Wine and just before the closing doxology.)*

Lord God, loving Father, You bring healing to the sick through Your Son Jesus Christ. Hear us as we pray to You in faith, and send the Holy Spirit, man's Helper and Friend, upon this oil, which nature has provided to serve the needs of men. May Your blessing come upon all who are anointed with this oil, that they may be freed from pain and illness and made well again in body, mind and soul. Father, may this oil be blessed † for our use in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.