

Anointing of the Sick

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 and indeed she exhorts them to contribute to the good of the People of God by freely uniting themselves to the Passion and death of Christ.

- Catechism of the Catholic Church 1499

If you would like to receive the sacrament of the sick or know someone who does, please contact your parish office or Fr. Peter.

The Sacrament of the Sick has been known by four different names throughout history. These names are:

- The “Last Rites”
- Extreme Unction
- Viaticum
- The Sacrament of the Sick

A Sacrament is a visible sign of God’s presence, God’s activity in our lives, in the Church and in our world. But it goes beyond that! Sacraments not only show us what God is like and what God dreams for us; Sacraments also make that happen!

Let’s look at the four titles that we have used to name this Sacrament.

If we call the Sacrament “The Last Rites,” this captures one important aspect of the Sacrament. It is often one of the last rituals celebrated with a person as he or she nears death. But if we focus on this alone, we kind of get the lens out of focus, don’t we? If we focus only on this Sacrament as a “Last Rite,” we miss the fact that it is meant to be celebrated with any person facing serious illness, a change in health or surgery. The Sacrament is a healing one, and can affect body, mind and spirit. Any Sacrament is meant to tell us something about God. In this Sacrament, God’s particular care for the sick and vulnerable is revealed and celebrated by the Church. Therefore, it is much more than “the Last Rites,” although this is one way that this Sacrament is celebrated.

If we call the Sacrament “Extreme Unction,” this also captures one aspect of the Sacrament, for the Sacrament does involve anointing. “Unction” means “Anointing.” In the Sacrament of the Sick, the person who is ill or suffering is anointed. Anointing with oil is intended to strengthen the sick person. The person may be strengthened to face the illness or surgery. The person might also be strengthened to face death. Anointing is also often a healing act, and, once again, that can mean healing of body, mind or spirit. What God wants to accomplish in this Sacrament is strengthening and healing.

A third name sometimes given to this Sacrament is “Viaticum.” “Viaticum” means “Food for the Journey.” Traditionally, one of the “Last Rites” is giving the dying person Communion. If we call the Sacrament “Viaticum,” we are recognizing that the Eucharist is indeed food for that final

journey home to God; it may also be food to sustain the person on the road of returning to health and wholeness.

If, however, we call this Sacrament the “Sacrament of the Sick,” then we have the focus more clear. The Sacrament is really about what God wants to do in us and through us and for us in this wonderful encounter. It tells us that God is love, and love is always oriented toward healing and wholeness. God dreams that we might all be one, whole and live a life not touched by death. Sickness is not part of God’s will for humanity. Sickness and death came into the world with sin. IF we face illness, God walks with us every step of the way, and sustains us and strengthens us with the Sacraments and through the love and concern of the Church, family, friends and health care professionals. God’s will is that all people will be healed and reconciled with one another and with God.

To request a visit in from Fr Peter, please reach out to your parish office or contact Fr. Peter 320-287-2926 Fr.Peter @isantiacc.org