

Ask Fr. James

Is anointing of the sick only for people who are really sick?

In the Epistle of St. James, we read:

"Is any among you sick? Let him call for the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 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" (James 5:14-15).

The sacrament of "Anointing of the Sick" is a special opportunity for the Lord's healing power. The sacrament can be given and received individually and communally in a celebration in which those to be anointed are surrounded and supported by other members of the Christian community. The oil used was blessed by the Bishop at the last Chrism mass. Because of Apostolic succession, the healing touch that comes to us through the priests and bishop is a healing touch from Christ and is a healing touch on the whole of our being in all its dimensions (physical, social, political, economic, cultural and religious). The anointing essentially liberates us from whatever forces have in bondage; physical or psychological and restore to social integration those excluded by suffering and evil. This sacrament points to our God as capable of communing with the pain of humanity. They are the expression of God's benevolence and magnanimity and are the manifestation that God has vanquished the powers of evil through Jesus Christ.

In the Gospels, Jesus affected the depths of the pain and suffering of people and groups and the injustice and the oppression they suffer. He feels pain for people because they are dispossessed and dispirited, oppressed and unfairly treated. This sacrament heals and reconcile us in God's tender mercy. The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is given to those who are "seriously ill" by anointing them on the forehead and hands with duly blessed oil—pressed from olives or from other plants—saying, only once: "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1513).

You may email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he would answer them in our Sunday Bulletins.