

# The Healing Touch of Christ

by Fr. Mark Pavlik ~ March 7, 2010

*“Are there any who are sick among you? Let him call for the priests 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.”*  
(Jas 5:14-15)

We continue on our examination of the seven sacraments by looking at the sacrament of anointing. Christ's compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity is a sign that God has visited his people and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. All throughout the Gospels, Jesus performed healings: some from physical ailment and others from sin. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he came to heal the whole person, soul and body.

His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw all those who suffer in body and soul to Himself. He makes use of signs to heal: spittle and the laying on of hands, mud and washing. The sick try to touch him, “for power came forth from him and healed them all.” And so in the sacraments Christ continues to “touch” us in order to heal us.

Moved by so much suffering, Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.” (Mt 8:17) His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the “sin of the world,” of which illness is only a consequence. By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can now configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion.

Christ invites his disciples to follow Him by taking up their cross. By following Him they acquire a new outlook on illness and the sick. Jesus associates them with his own life of poverty and service. He makes them share in his ministry of compassion and healing: “So they went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.” (Mk 6:12-13)

The anointing is therefore a source of strength for both the soul and the body, especially intended to strengthen those who are being tried by illness. From ancient times in the liturgical traditions of both East and West, we have testimonies to the practice of anointing the sick with blessed oil. Over the centuries the Anointing of the Sick was conferred more and more exclusively on those at the point of death and thus received the name, “Extreme Unction” or “Last Rites.” But regardless of the name, the sacrament has never failed to beg the Lord that the sick person may recover their health.

The celebration of the Anointing of the Sick consists primarily of the laying on of hands and the anointing of the forehead and hands with the oil of the sick. The Anointing of the Sick is not a sacrament only for those who are at the point of death. As soon as any one of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, they are eligible to receive the sacrament. If a sick person who received this anointing recovers his health, he can receive this sacrament again. Like all the sacraments the Anointing of the Sick is a liturgical and communal celebration, whether it takes place in the family home, a hospital or church, for a single sick person or a whole group of sick persons. Next weekend, we will offer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick following the 4:00 pm Mass on Saturday, March 13 and following the 10:00 am Mass on Sunday, March 14. If you know someone who would benefit from this healing sacrament, please bring them to one of these Masses. If they are not able to come to church, let the parish office know and one of the priests will go to anoint them wherever they are. Next weekend we will all pray for those in our community who suffer from any infirmity or pain and commend them to the healing power of Christ.