

November 15, 2017

Dear Parishioners:

In 1963 when the Bishops of Vatican II issued their document on the reform of the liturgy, one of the changes was in the name of one of the sacraments. Formerly called Extreme Unction, it is now called Anointing of the Sick. The very name “extreme unction” has a foreboding sound to it. People often felt that when a person was at the extremes of their life and nothing else could be done, it was time to call in the priest for the sacramental coup de grâce. It had the name “extreme unction,” meaning final anointing—not because it was the last time a person would be anointed being close to death. Rather it was to distinguish it from the person’s previous anointings, those of baptism and confirmation.

Anointing of the Sick is performed to heal those afflicted by illness. It is primarily spiritual but can also be physical. Canon 1004 of the Code of Canon Law says: “1. The anointing of the sick can be administered to a member of the faithful who, having reached the age of reason, begins to be in danger due to sickness or old age. 2. This sacrament can be repeated if the sick person, having recovered, again becomes gravely ill or if the condition becomes more grave during the same illness.” The ritual itself adds: “A sick person may be anointed before surgery whenever a serious illness is the reason for the surgery. Elderly people may be anointed if they have become notably weakened even though no serious illness is present.” It is not a sacrament of the dying but of the sick. When one is dying it is time for viaticum (final Holy Communion), the food for that final journey, and for commending the dying person’s soul to the Lord.

Another aspect of the reform of the sacraments was to have communal celebrations of sacraments, including the Anointing of the Sick. All sacraments are communal of their very nature, so it is most fitting that they be celebrated with the community present. The Body of Christ gathers to strengthen the members of the body that are weak due to illness.

This sacrament is celebrated communally twice a year: the first Saturday of June and the first Saturday of December. We reach out to those at home or at rest homes who cannot come to Mass regularly but receive Communion at home. On Saturday, December 2, at 10:00 a.m. we will be celebrating a Mass of Anointing. During that Mass the priests of the parish will anoint all those in need of the sacrament. Even if you don’t need to be anointed, I invite all of you to come to pray for and with those who will be receiving this sacrament. It is how all of us can minister to our brothers and sisters in need of the healing presence of Christ.

The day after the Mass of Anointing is the First Sunday of Advent. May you have a blessed Advent season as we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ.

Yours in Christ,

Reverend Monsignor David A. Sork
Pastor