

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

This weekend's Gospel is about how Jesus raises the only son of the widow of Nain. Among other things, it is a reminder that Jesus has all authority and power, even over death. As God, Jesus conquers death and its power. In our examination of the Sacraments, this brings to mind the **Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick**. Formerly called "extreme unction" (meaning "last anointing") or "Last Rites," it reminds us that Jesus gave the Sacraments to the Church so that we could get to Heaven. God always has His eyes on the long range plan – He will suffer with neglect and sin in order that we have the greatest opportunity to be with Him for eternity. Each of the Sacraments are meant to help us to grow here – yes, here, but not for the sole purpose of this world, but so that we can one day be with God. The Anointing of the Sick, as it is used at the point of death, points to this reality more than most. Let's look at this a bit more.

What happens in the Anointing of the Sick? As we know, all of the Sacraments use visible, tangible realities to point to an invisible reality. The Anointing is an extension of the healing ministry of Jesus. We hear in the Letter of James:

Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven. (5:14-15)

The laying on of hands and anointing by the presbyters (priests) brings about the healing power of God. There is a true **physical healing** that happens with this Anointing. Most priests have stories of how they went to Anoint someone who was dying, but the person ended up healed (most often not in a single instant, but still contrary to what was expected by medical personnel). There truly is a physical healing that happens with the Anointing. There is also a *spiritual* healing that happens. We believe that the Sacrament of the Anointing **forgives** venial sins. This should not surprise us that there are both physical and spiritual healings going on, since we are *embodied souls* or *ensouled bodies* – our bodies and our souls are so connected that they affect one another. This is the whole point of the Sacraments – what we do to our bodies affects our souls.

But what about when people are not cured? It is always a difficult question to ask why some people receive a physical cure and others do not. Sometimes it has to do with our choices, sometimes it has to do with God's greater plan. We do know, though, that there is *always* healing with the Anointing of the Sick. As a person may be preparing to enter Heaven, the Sacrament gives courage and peace, forgiveness and trust in God's Providence. It can truly help a soul to prepare itself to see God. I would encourage you not to wait until the last minute to be Anointed or have your loved one Anointed. While the Sacraments are efficacious (effective) in and of themselves, God also wants *us* to play a part in it. People who are unconscious and anointed at the point of death do receive the grace of God, but how much more effective it is in their lives when they can participate, receive the graces with an open heart, and make a conscious decision to prepare themselves. Also, Confession and Eucharist are part of the "Sacraments of the Dying", neither of which can be received if the person is not conscious. Again, I strongly encourage you, if you or a loved one is dying – receive the Sacrament *now* while there is greater opportunity to grab ahold of God's grace.

The Anoint of the Sick is NOT JUST FOR THE DYING, though. If your sicknesses or conditions are severe enough that they have taken the majority of your attention (for instance a feared surgery, old age, chronic debilitating pain, etc.) the Sacrament is there to help bring Jesus' peace, courage, strength and healing. Embrace the healing power of the Sacraments!

So what do we see happening at an anointing? The priest greets the people, and prays a prayer which includes the reading from James (above). In silence, the priest then lays his hands on the person's head and prays. After that, the priest anoints the person's forehead with the Oil of the Sick (blessed by the Bishop during Holy week) saying, "**Through this holy anointing may the Lord in His love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.**" He then anoints the person's hands saying, "**May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.**" In the case of someone who is dying, the priest may choose to bestow the Apostolic Pardon, which, if the person is disposed to receive the grace, removes all temporal punishment due to sin (a "get out of or Purgatory" prayer). Usually the Lord's Prayer is then prayed, and a closing prayer. In the case of someone who is dying, I will often also pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet, since Jesus promises great graces and mercy for those dying.