

Catholic

UPDATE

© 2018 LIGUORI
PUBLICATIONS,
A REDEMPTORIST
MINISTRY.

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE
LIGUORI, MO
63057-9999

800-325-9521
LIGUORI.ORG

PHOTOCOPYING
PROHIBITED.

C9601A

Liguori Publications • © 2018 All rights reserved.

Liguori.org • 800-325-9521

ANOINTING THE SICK A PARISH SACRAMENT

The sacrament of the anointing of the sick is a communal celebration of healing in body, soul, and spirit.

BY FR. THOMAS RICHSTATTER, OFM



CNS PHOTO/VICTOR ALEMÁN, VIDA-VUEVA.COM

Have you ever been seriously ill? Have you ever been anointed during a celebration of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick? If you answered yes to the first question, I hope you answered yes to the second also. When the sacrament of the anointing of the sick becomes a more normal part of Catholic experience, the primary thrust of the Second Vatican Council's renewal of the sacrament will have been achieved.

The revision's intent, said Pope Paul VI in 1975, was "to lead to a wider availability of the sacrament and to extend it—within reasonable limits—even beyond cases of mortal illness."

JESUS, SACRAMENT OF HEALING

Our mission as Church is to do what Jesus did. And on nearly every page of the gospels we read of Jesus' concern for the sick. Healing was essential to the mission of the disciples: "He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two... [T]hey anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them" (see Mark 6:7–13). After Jesus ascended into heaven, the Church continued to be a sacrament of healing: "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" (James 5:14–15).

In the course of time, the focus of the sacrament shifted from healing to forgiveness of sins, and the time for receiving the sacrament was delayed to the deathbed when forgiveness of sins would also be the final preparation for heaven. "Over the centuries the Anointing of the Sick was conferred more and more exclusively on those at the point of death. Because of this it received the name 'Extreme Unction'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1512). The sacrament of the sick had become the last anointing, the unction *in extremis*.

The Second Vatican Council wanted to remedy this situation. It placed the sacrament once again in the context of mutual prayer and concern described in the Epistle of James. Anointing "is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 73) but is intended for all those who are seriously ill.

Consequently, what we had formerly called "extreme unction" is now more properly called "the sacrament of the anointing of the sick" (see *CSL* 73).

More has changed than the sacrament's name. Our experience of the revised sacrament of the anointing of the sick has brought about a change in the way we think about it: (1) like all sacraments, it



© OSCAR C. WILLIAMS / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Liguori Publications • © 2018 All rights reserved.
Liguori.org • 800-325-9521

DIG DEEPER

Describe how the Church can be an instrument of healing.

Would you rather see anointing at church or in private? Why?

What areas of your life need the healing power of Christ?