

## Catholic Sacraments / Anointing of the Sick

The Church has always had a special mission to the sick, from visiting and giving communion to a sick person at home, to building hospitals and clinics to care for those who are seriously ill. The very early Church followed the words of St. James by anointing the sick with blessed oil, as is done today in this sacrament:

*"Are any among you sick? Let them call for the elders of the Church to pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick ones, and the Lord will raise them up; and if they have committed any sins, they will be forgiven." - James 5:14-15*



Sickness, pain and death are evils which are not part of God's original plan for humankind. He does not desire them for us, nor does he watch impassive and uncaring while His people suffer. Part of Jesus' ministry was to heal the sick, and He went about curing those who were ill or disabled, showing that suffering and death have no place in the Kingdom of God. By His sacrifice of Himself, He took hold of suffering and death and eliminated their power to separate us from each other or from God. Our faith tells us that, indeed, God suffers with us. Through Jesus' suffering and death, God joins His suffering to the suffering of human beings. And by doing this, He transforms and gives it a new meaning. To say that through Jesus' redemptive suffering our sufferings can have meaning isn't to trivialize them in any way, nor does it make them any easier. Yet, by joining ourselves with the suffering of Christ, our pain, our sense of isolation and loss can become part of the saving work of Christ, who endured agony and died for men and women.

Through the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick we are assured that God will raise us up, like Jesus, from our bed of pain and sickness and lead us to eternal life. Through it we are comforted when we feel most abandoned. The sacramental act begins with the priest administering a short rite of penance, signifying forgiveness and reconciliation. This is followed by a reading. Then, in silence, the priest lays his hands on the sick person, and anoints the forehead and palms with oil, saying:

Through this holy anointing may the Lord in His love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up. Amen."