



ANOINTING OF THE SICK

LITURGY BYTES *by Michele Hall*



A Sacrament that is often forgotten about or misunderstood is the Anointing of the Sick. It is also one of the Sacraments of Healing, the other being Reconciliation. This Sacrament has an interesting history, which has led to a great deal of misunderstanding. Some folks refer to it as Last Rites, as for many years it was known as that. Going back, it was called Extreme Unction and was celebrated when a person was close to or already dead. Our understanding today is quite different. Notice the change of name – Anointing of the Sick.

Actually, there is no such thing as the Last Rites in the Church today with the exception of Viaticum which refers to the reception of Holy Communion for the last time. The word Viaticum means “for the journey.” The person is receiving the Eucharist to help them on their way to heaven. Fortunately today, even if someone is not able to go to Mass, we have Eucharistic Ministers who visit the homebound and bring Holy Communion to them weekly.

You might ask, who can and when can we receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick? Here are some examples: one going into the hospital; one going for surgery, one who has a serious illness (mental, emotional, or physical); one who is of advanced age; one who has a recurrence of an illness or a setback; and, of course, anyone with a terminal illness. It is best not to wait but to take advantage of this beautiful Sacrament of healing. This Sacrament is celebrated with the Oil of the Sick, which is blessed by the Bishop each year at the Chrism Mass. The minister of this Sacrament is only a Bishop or a Priest. The reason for this restriction is the person being anointed is also forgiven of their sins, which can only be done by a Bishop or Priest. The person is anointed on their head and hands with this final prayer: “May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.” Amen.

May you have a blessed, healthy, and happy week ahead!