

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

When you or a loved one are facing surgery or a serious illness you should ask for the sacrament of healing. It was a longstanding tradition that anointing of the sick was reserved only for those who were at the point of death. The anointing was therefore combined with special prayers for the dying. The two rituals together came to be known as "The Last Rites."

At the Second Vatican Council the fathers of the church restored anointing of the sick to its proper function in the church. We now offer the sacrament not only at the point of death, but whenever a person is seriously ill, facing surgery, or recovering from surgery.

When a person is sick or facing surgery, the anointing can be done after Mass in church in a quiet ceremony. The sacrament is often administered at the bedside in hospital or at home. When the person is dying the sacrament is completed with administration of communion called Viaticum or "Food for the Journey" and by praying together the prayers for passing.

The sacrament of anointing can bring physical healing, but its work is deeper and often one experiences healing in many different ways.

Whenever I have anointed someone there have been results, but the results are not always physical. I remember one person who had terminal cancer, and after she was anointed, I asked if anything had happened. Had she received any kind of healing? Her eyes welled up and she said, "Father, you'll never believe this, but I have been estranged from my daughter in law for thirty years. The afternoon after the anointing she called me on the phone and we were reconciled." So, this woman did not receive physical healing, but a wounded relationship was healed, and she died in peace a few weeks later.

Anointing of the sick therefore, is an important and beautiful ministry of Christ through his Church to his flock. If you or a loved one is sick or in danger of dying, you must make sure you call a Catholic priest and ask for anointing of the sick. If you are in the hospital, ask for the Catholic chaplain. If you are near to home, keep my number handy. I will come anywhere, at any time to anoint a seriously ill person who needs this expression of Christ's love and healing power.

We all need to prepare properly for our passing, and being aware of the sacrament of anointing is part of the duty of a good Catholic. It is also important to prepare our families and community for our passing, and I will write about this next week.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker