

CHAPTER 8

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

A. INTRODUCTION

- 8.1.1 The sacred anointing of the sick was instituted by Christ our Lord as a true and proper sacrament of the New Testament. “It is alluded to indeed by Mark, but is recommended to the faithful and promulgated by James the Apostle and brother of the Lord.” From ancient times in the liturgical traditions of both East and West, there are testimonies to the practice of anointings of the sick with blessed oil. 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.” Notwithstanding this evolution the liturgy has never failed to beg the Lord that the sick person may recover his health if it would be conducive to his salvation.⁸⁸⁵
- 8.1.2 In this sacrament the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, that he may raise them up and save them. Through the anointing with the blessed oil by the priest and through his prayers, Christ gives health and strength to the soul and sometimes to the body when we are in danger of death from sickness, accident, or old age.⁸⁸⁶
- 8.1.3 Through this sacrament the Church also exhorts the sick to contribute to the good of the People of God by freely uniting themselves to the Passion and death of Christ.⁸⁸⁷
- 8.1.4 There has been a growing recognition that the sick, especially the chronically ill, share in the Church’s life and mission. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explicitly ties baptism and confirmation to the anointing of the sick, and says,

⁸⁸⁵ CCC 1511-1512; cf. Council of Trent, Session XIV, *Doctrina de extremae unctionis* (1551) 1, and can. 1: DS 1695; 1716; cf. Mark 6: 13; James 5: 14-15.

⁸⁸⁶ CCC 1499; Bishop Donald W. Wuerl, et al., eds., *The Gift of Faith* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2001) 247.

⁸⁸⁷ CCC 1499. See Colossians 1: 24: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church...” Cf. Romans 8: 16-17: “The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.” See also 2 Corinthians 1: 5: “For as Christ’s sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow.”

“In a way a sick person is consecrated to bear fruit by configuration to the Savior’s redemptive passion.”⁸⁸⁸

8.1.5 The Second Vatican Council called on bishops to encourage their people, especially the sick and the suffering, to offer prayers and works of penance to God for the evangelization of the world. Pope John Paul II developed the idea of the vocation of the sick in many of his writings: “Even the sick are sent forth as laborers into the Lord’s vineyard.”⁸⁸⁹

8.1.6 When the sacrament was given at the point of death, there could be little notion of the “vocation of the sick.” However, as Pope John Paul II wrote, “The mission of the Church is not only the responsibility of the healthy and the strong.... The sick, disabled, terminally ill and aged [are] in a position to commit themselves as messengers of Christ’s liberating and healing presence.” He wrote also that the sick should be encouraged “to offer their sufferings to God for missionaries. By making such an offering, the sick themselves become missionaries.”⁸⁹⁰

8.1.7 It is important that all the faithful, and above all the sick, be aided by suitable catechesis in preparing for and participating in the sacraments of anointing and Holy Viaticum, especially if the celebration is to be carried out communally. In this way they will understand more fully what has been said about these sacraments, and their celebration will nourish, strengthen, and manifest faith more effectively. For the prayer of faith which accompanies the celebration of the sacrament is nourished by the profession of faith.⁸⁹¹

B. MINISTERS

8.2.1 Every priest, and a priest alone (*sacerdos*), validly administers the anointing of the sick.⁸⁹²

⁸⁸⁸ CCC 1521; cf. 1294, 1523. At the same time, the anointing of the sick has not been considered a consecratory anointing. See SCDW, reply: *Notitiae* 7 (1971) 107-110; DOL 1026-1028, note R2, reply 6. Interestingly, however, RR1952, tit. VI, *De sacramento extremae unctionis*, cap. I, n. 16 specified that a priest receiving extreme unction was to be anointed on the back of the hands, and not on the palms as other people, for the priest’s hands had “already” been consecrated at his ordination.

⁸⁸⁹ AG 38. Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (1988) 53; Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio* (1990) 78; Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris* (1984) 19, 24.

⁸⁹⁰ S. de Boer, “The Collective Anointing of the Weak,” *Questions liturgiques* 76 (1995) 74.

⁸⁹¹ PCS 36.

⁸⁹² CIC can. 1003 §1. See also CDF, Note on the Minister of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, 11 February 2005. EDM 9 §2: “With regard to the administration of this sacrament, ecclesiastical legislation reiterates the theologically certain doctrine and the age old usage of the Church which regards the priest as its only valid minister. This norm is completely coherent with the theological mystery signified and

8.2.2 All priests to whom the care of souls has been entrusted have the duty and right of administering the anointing of the sick for the faithful entrusted to their pastoral office. For a reasonable cause, any other priest can administer this sacrament with at least the presumed consent of the priest mentioned above.⁸⁹³

C. RECIPIENTS

8.3.1 The anointing of the sick can be administered to a member of the faithful who, having reached the use of reason, begins to be in danger due to sickness or old age.⁸⁹⁴

- a. A sick person may be anointed before surgery whenever a serious illness is the reason for the surgery.⁸⁹⁵
- b. Elderly people may be anointed if they have become notably weakened even though no serious illness is present.⁸⁹⁶

8.3.2 Sick children are to be anointed if they have sufficient use of reason to be strengthened by this sacrament. In case of doubt whether a child has reached the use of reason, the sacrament is to be conferred.⁸⁹⁷

8.3.3 Infants, inasmuch as they have not attained the use of reason and therefore are not capable of committing personal sins, are not candidates for the reception of the sacrament. It is certainly permissible to pray for the healing of a sick infant.

realized by means of priestly service. It must also be affirmed that the reservation of the ministry of anointing to the priest is related to the connection of this sacrament to the forgiveness of sin and the worthy reception of the Holy Eucharist. No other person may act as ordinary or extraordinary minister of the sacrament since such constitutes simulation of the sacrament." See also ADW, Liturgical Norms and Policies, 2010, 13.6.4, regarding lay people anointing with unblessed oil.

⁸⁹³ CIC can. 1003 §2.

⁸⁹⁴ CIC can. 1004 §1. With the completion of the seventh year, a minor is presumed to have the use of reason. See CIC can. 97 §2, and the note to ADW, Liturgical Norms and Policies, 2010, 8.3.2. 1917 CIC can. 940 §1 referred to "danger of death from infirmity or old age." The reference to death (*periculo mortis*) was removed from the 1983 CIC, the requirement to wait for danger from death having already been mitigated by the introductory texts to PCS. The danger must be from an intrinsic cause, such as disease or injury, and not from an extrinsic cause, such as the danger of battle or impending execution.

⁸⁹⁵ PCS 10.

⁸⁹⁶ PCS 11.

⁸⁹⁷ PCS 12; cf. SCSDW, Decree *Promulgatio codice*, 9 December 1983: *Notitiae* 19 (1983) 55; CIC can. 1005. See also ADW, Liturgical Norms and Policies, 2010, 2.1.6.b, 2.44.2, 3.7.1-3, 4.8.2-3, 5.3.1, 5.6.2, 5.7.1-2, 7.5.8, 7.7.15, 9.17.3.a.

- 8.3.4 The sacrament can be repeated if the sick person, having recovered, again becomes gravely ill or if the condition becomes more grave during the same illness.⁸⁹⁸
- 8.3.5 The sacrament is to be administered in a case of doubt whether the sick person has attained the use of reason, is dangerously ill, or is dead.⁸⁹⁹
- 8.3.6 The sacrament is to be conferred on the sick who at least implicitly requested it when they were in control of their faculties.⁹⁰⁰
- 8.3.7 The sacrament is not to be conferred upon those who persevere obstinately in manifest grave sin.⁹⁰¹
- 8.3.8 In public and private catechesis, the faithful should be educated to ask for the sacrament of anointing and, as soon as the right time comes, to receive it with full faith and devotion. They should not follow the wrongful practice of delaying the reception of the sacrament. All who care for the sick should be taught its meaning and purpose.⁹⁰²

D. NOTES ON RITES, TIMES, AND PLACES

Matter and Form

- 8.4.1 The *matter* of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick consists of olive oil, or, according to circumstances, other oil derived from plants, which has been consecrated by a bishop or a priest. The *form* of the sacrament consists of the solemn prayer which the priest recites as the anointings are administered.⁹⁰³
- 8.4.2 The anointing of the sick is conferred by anointing them with oil and pronouncing the words prescribed in the liturgical books.⁹⁰⁴

⁸⁹⁸ CIC can. 1004 §2.

⁸⁹⁹ CIC can. 1005.

⁹⁰⁰ CIC can. 1006; PCS 14.

⁹⁰¹ CIC can. 1007.

⁹⁰² PCS 13.

⁹⁰³ PCS 20. Council of Trent, Session XIV, *Doctrina de sacramento extremae unctionis* (1551) 1: DS 1695; *Catechism of the Council of Trent (Roman Catechism)* II, 4, 5: "Just as olive oil is diversely efficacious in soothing the body, so, too, this sacrament diversely soothes the soul. Oil restores health and braces spirits; it gives light and renews strength. All these same effects are spiritually produced in the sick person by the divine power operative in this sacrament."

⁹⁰⁴ CIC can. 998.

- 8.4.3 The oil used for the anointing of the sick must be blessed for this purpose by the bishop or by a priest who has the faculty, either from the law or by special concession of the Apostolic See.⁹⁰⁵
- 8.4.4 In addition to a bishop, the following can bless the oil to be used in the anointing of the sick:
- a. those equivalent to a diocesan bishop by law;⁹⁰⁶
 - b. any presbyter in a case of necessity, but only in the actual celebration of the sacrament.⁹⁰⁷
- 8.4.5 Any priest is permitted to carry blessed oil with him so that he is able to administer the sacrament of the anointing of the sick in a case of necessity.⁹⁰⁸
- 8.4.6 In case of true necessity only, a priest may increase the volume of blessed oils by adding unblest oil to them. It would be an abuse, however, if this practice became routine for the sake of expedience or convenience.⁹⁰⁹

Ritual Notes

- 8.5.1 The anointings with the words, order, and manner prescribed in the liturgical books are to be performed carefully. In a case of necessity, however, a single anointing on the forehead or even on some other part of the body is sufficient, while the entire formula is said.⁹¹⁰
- 8.5.2 The priest is to perform the anointings with his own hand, unless a grave reason warrants the use of an instrument.⁹¹¹
- 8.5.3 Holy Viaticum for the sick is not to be delayed too long; those who have the care of souls are to be zealous and vigilant that the sick are nourished by Viaticum while fully conscious.⁹¹²

⁹⁰⁵ PCS 21.

⁹⁰⁶ CIC can. 999 1°. Those who are equivalent to diocesan bishops by law are territorial prelates and abbots, vicars and prefects apostolic, apostolic administrators of permanently established apostolic administrations, and superiors of *sui iuris* missions. CIC cann. 381 §2, 368.

⁹⁰⁷ CIC can. 999 2°.

⁹⁰⁸ CIC can. 1003 §3.

⁹⁰⁹ CDWDS, Response, 18 April 1994, in BCLN August-September 1994; RRAA 1996, 10.

⁹¹⁰ CIC can. 1000 §1.

⁹¹¹ CIC can. 1000 §2.

⁹¹² CIC can. 922.

- 8.5.4 A priest who administers the sacraments to someone in danger of death should not fail to impart the apostolic blessing to which a plenary indulgence is attached.⁹¹³

Times and Places

- 8.6.1 The communal celebration of the anointing of the sick for many of the sick at once, who have been suitably prepared and are properly disposed, can be performed according to the prescripts of the Archbishop.⁹¹⁴
- 8.6.2 If there is to be a communal celebration of the sacrament in a parish church or chapel, the building must be accessible to those with disabilities, including those in wheelchairs and those who must travel with a breathing apparatus.⁹¹⁵
- 8.6.3 Since many of those to be anointed may be unable to approach the priest, the parish will want to provide an area where the priest is able to approach persons with disabilities with ease and grace. Often this is possible in a section of the church that has flexible rather than fixed seating.⁹¹⁶
- 8.6.4 The sacrament will often be administered to sick persons in hospitals or in private homes, in which case the abbreviated rite may be used.⁹¹⁷

⁹¹³ MI, grants, 12 §1.

⁹¹⁴ CIC can. 1002. PCS 97-130 (Anointing Outside Mass) and 131-148 (Anointing within Mass). See also ADW, Liturgical Norms and Policies, 2010, 13.6.1-13.8.3.

⁹¹⁵ BLS 109.

⁹¹⁶ BLS 109.

⁹¹⁷ PCS 149-160.