

PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK
Rites of Anointing and Viaticum

THE ROMAN RITUAL

Revised by Decree of the

Second Vatican Ecumenical Council

and published by Authority of Pope Paul VI

Approved for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America

By the National Conference of Catholic Bishops

And Confirmed by the Apostolic See

Prepared by the

International Commission on English in the Liturgy [ICEL]

(A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences)

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General Introduction

Human Sickness and Its Meaning in the Mystery of Salvation

1. Suffering and illness have always been among the greatest problems that trouble the human spirit. Christians feel and experience pain as do all other people; yet their faith helps them to grasp more deeply the mystery of suffering and to bear their pain with greater courage. From Christ's words they know that sickness has meaning and value for their own salvation and for the salvation of the world. They also know that Christ, who during his life often visited and healed the sick, loves them in their illness.

2. Although closely linked with the human condition, sickness cannot as a general rule be regarded as a punishment inflicted on each individual for personal sins (see John 9:3). Christ himself, who is without sin, in fulfilling the words of Isaiah took on all the wounds of his passion and shared in all human pain (see Isaiah 53:4-5). Christ is still pained and tormented in his members, made like him. Still, our afflictions seem but momentary and slight when compared to the greatness of the eternal glory for which they prepare us (see 2 Corinthians 4:17).

3. Part of the plan laid out by God's providence is that we should fight strenuously against all sickness and carefully seek the blessings of good health, so that we may fulfill our role in human society and in the Church. Yet we should always be prepared to fill up what is lacking in Christ's suffering for the salvation of the world as we look forward to creation's being set free in the glory of the children of God (see Col 1:24; Rom 8:19-21). Moreover, the role of the sick in the Church is to be a reminder to others of the essential or higher things. By their witness the sick show that our mortal life must be redeemed through the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.

4. The sick person is not the only one who should fight against illness. Doctors and all who are devoted in any way to caring for the sick should consider it their duty to use all the means which in their judgment may help the sick, both physically and spiritually. In so doing, they are fulfilling the command of Christ to visit the sick, for Christ implied that those who visit the sick should be concerned for the whole person and offer both physical relief and spiritual comfort.

Celebration of the Sacraments for the Sick and the Dying

Anointing of the Sick

5. The Lord himself showed great concern for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the sick and commanded his followers to do likewise. This is clear from the gospels, and above all from the existence of the sacrament of anointing, which he instituted and which is made known in the Letter of James. Since then the Church has never ceased to celebrate this sacrament for its members by the anointing and the prayer of its priests, commending those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, that he may raise them up and save them (see Jas 5:14-16). Moreover, the Church exhorts them to associate themselves willingly with the passion and death of Christ (see Rom 8:17), and thus contribute to the welfare of the people of God.

Those who are seriously ill need the special help of God's grace in this time of anxiety, lest they be broken in spirit and, under the pressure of temptation, perhaps weakened in their faith.

This is why, through the sacrament of anointing, Christ strengthens the faithful who are afflicted by illness, providing them with the strongest means of support.

The celebration of the sacrament consists especially in the laying on of hands by the priests of the Church, the offering of the prayer of faith, and the anointing of the sick with oil made holy by God's blessing. This rite signifies the grace of the sacrament and confers it.

6. This sacrament gives the grace of the Holy Spirit to those who are sick: by this grace the whole person is helped and saved, sustained by trust in God, and strengthened against the temptations of the Evil One and against anxiety over death. Thus the sick person is able not only to bear suffering bravely, but also to fight against it. A return to physical health may follow the reception of this sacrament if it will be beneficial to the sick person's salvation. If necessary, the sacrament also provides the sick person with the forgiveness of sins and the completion of Christian penance.

7. In the anointing of the sick, which includes the prayer of faith (see Jas 5:15), faith itself is manifested. Above all this faith must be made actual both in the minister of the sacrament and, even more importantly, in the recipient. The sick person will be saved by personal faith and the faith of the Church, which looks back to the death and resurrection of Christ, the source of the sacrament's power (see Jas 5:15), and looks ahead to the future kingdom that is pledged in the sacraments.

Recipients of the Anointing of the Sick

8. The Letter of James states that the sick are to be anointed in order to raise them up and save them. Great care and concern should be taken to see that those of the faithful whose health is seriously impaired by sickness or old age receive this sacrament.

A prudent or reasonably sure judgment, without scruple, is sufficient for deciding on the seriousness of an illness; if necessary a doctor may be consulted.

9. The sacrament may be repeated if the sick person recovers after being anointed and then again falls ill or if during the same illness the person's condition becomes more serious.

10. A sick person may be anointed before surgery whenever a serious illness is the reason for the surgery.

11. Elderly people may be anointed if they have become notably weakened even though no serious illness is present.

12. 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.

13. 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 the meaning and purpose of the sacrament.

14. The sacrament of anointing is to be conferred on sick people who, although they have lost consciousness or the use of reason, would, as Christian believers, have at least implicitly asked for it when they were in control of their faculties.

15. When a priest has been called to attend those who are already dead, he should not administer the sacrament of anointing. Instead, he should pray for them, asking that God forgive their sins and graciously receive them into the kingdom. But if the priest is doubtful whether the sick person is dead, he is to confer the sacrament (conditionally (no. 269)).^[10]

The anointing of the sick is not to be conferred on anyone who remains obdurately in open and serious sin.

Minister of the Anointing of the Sick

16. The priest is the only proper minister of the anointing of the sick.

This office is ordinarily exercised by bishops, parish priests (pastors) and their assistants, chaplains of health care facilities, and superiors of clerical religious institutes.

17. These ministers have the pastoral responsibility both of preparing and helping the sick and others who are present, with the assistance of religious and laity, and of celebrating the sacrament.

The diocesan bishop has the responsibility of supervising celebrations at which many sick persons may come together to receive the sacrament.

18. For a reasonable cause any other priest may confer this sacrament with at least the presumed consent of the minister mentioned in no. 16, whom the priest need only inform later.

19. Where two or more priests are present for the anointing of a sick person, one of them may say the prayers and carry out the anointing, saying the sacramental form. The others may take the remaining parts, such as the introductory rites, readings, invocations, or instructions. Each priest may lay hands on the sick person.

Requirements for Celebrating the Anointing of the Sick

20. The matter proper for this sacrament is olive oil or, according to circumstances, other oil derived from plants.

21. 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.

The law itself permits the following, besides a bishop, to bless the oil of the sick:

- a. those whom the law equates with diocesan bishops;
- b. in case of necessity, any priest, but only within the celebration of the sacrament.

The oil of the sick is ordinarily blessed by the bishop on Holy Thursday.

22. If a priest in accord with no. 21b, is to bless the oil during the rite, he may bring the unblessed oil with him, or the family of the sick person may prepare the oil in a suitable vessel. If any of the oil is left after the celebration of the sacrament, it should be absorbed in cotton (cotton wool) and burned.

If the priest uses oil that has already been blessed (either by the bishop or by a priest), he brings it with him in the vessel in which it is kept. This vessel, made of suitable material, should be clean and should contain sufficient oil (soaked in cotton [cotton wool] for convenience). In this case, after celebrating the sacrament the

priest returns the vessel to the place where it is kept with proper respect. He should make sure that the oil remains fit for use and should replenish it from time to time, either yearly when the bishop blesses the oil on Holy Thursday or more frequently if necessary.

23. The sick person is anointed on the forehead and on the hands. It is appropriate to divide the sacramental form so that the first part is said while the forehead is anointed, the latter part while the hands are anointed.

In case of necessity, however, it is sufficient that a single anointing be given on the forehead or, because of the particular condition of the sick person, on another suitable part of the body, while the whole sacramental form is said.

24. Depending on the culture and traditions of different peoples, the number of anointings may be increased and the place of anointing may be changed. Directives on this should be included in the preparation of particular rituals.

25. The following is the sacramental form with which the anointing of the sick is given in the Latin rite:

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

Viaticum for the Dying

26. When in their passage from this life Christians are strengthened by the body and blood of Christ in viaticum, they have the pledge of the resurrection that the Lord promised "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day" (Jn 6:54).

When possible, viaticum should be received within Mass so that the sick person may receive communion under both kinds. Communion received as viaticum should be considered a special sign of participation in the mystery which is celebrated in the eucharist: the mystery of the death of the Lord and his passage to the Father.

27. All baptized Christians who are able to receive communion are bound to receive viaticum by reason of the precept to receive communion when in danger of death from any cause. Priests with pastoral responsibility must see that the celebration of this sacrament is not delayed, but that the faithful are nourished by it while still in full possession of their faculties.

28. It is also desirable that during the celebration of viaticum, Christians renew the faith professed at their baptism, by which they become adopted children of God and coheirs of the promise of eternal life.

29. The ordinary ministers of viaticum are the parish priest (pastor) and his assistants, chaplains, and, for all staying in the house, the superior in clerical religious institutes or societies of apostolic life.

In case of necessity or with at least the presumed permission of the competent minister, any priest or deacon is to give viaticum, or, if no ordained minister is available, any member of the faithful who has been duly appointed.

A deacon and other ministers follow the rite provided for "Viaticum outside Mass," nos. 197-211.

CONTINUOUS RITE

30. For special cases, when sudden illness or some other cause has unexpectedly placed one of the faithful in proximate danger of death, a continuous rite is provided by which the sick person may be given the sacraments of penance, anointing, and the eucharist as viaticum in a single celebration.

If death is imminent and there is not enough time to celebrate the three sacraments in the manner already described, the sick person should be given an opportunity to make a sacramental confession, even if it has to be a generic confession. After this, the person should be given viaticum, since all the faithful are bound to receive this sacrament if they are in danger of death. Then, if there is sufficient time, the sick person should be anointed.

The sick person who, because of the nature of the illness, cannot receive communion should be anointed.

31. If the sick person is to be strengthened by the sacrament of confirmation, nos. 238, 246, 276, 290 and 291 of this ritual should be consulted.

In danger of death, the law gives the faculty to confirm to parish priests (pastors) and in fact to any priest.

Offices and Ministries for the Sick

32. If one member suffers in the Body of Christ, which is the Church, all members suffer with that member (1 Cor 12:26). For this reason, kindness shown toward the sick and works of charity and mutual help for the relief of every kind of human want are held in special honor. Every scientific effort to prolong life and every act of care for the sick, on the part of any person, may be considered a preparation for the Gospel and a sharing in Christ's healing ministry.

33. It is thus especially fitting that all baptized Christians share in this ministry of mutual charity within the Body of Christ by doing all that they can to help the sick return to health, by showing love for the sick, and by celebrating the sacraments with them. Like the other sacraments, these too have a community aspect, which should be brought out as much as possible when they are celebrated.

34. The family and friends of the sick and those who take care of them in any way have a special share in this ministry of comfort. In particular, it is their task to strengthen the sick with words of faith and by praying with them, to commend them to the suffering and glorified Lord, and to encourage them to contribute to the well-being of the people of God by associating themselves willingly with Christ's passion and death. If the sickness grows worse, the family and friends of the sick and those who take care of them have the responsibility of informing the parish priest (pastor) and by their kind words of prudently disposing the sick for the reception of the sacraments at the proper time.

35. Priests, particularly parish priests (pastors) and the others mentioned in no. 16, should remember that it is their duty to care for the sick by personal visits and other acts of kindness. Especially when they give the sacraments, priests should stir up the hope of those present and strengthen their faith in Christ who suffered and is glorified. By bringing the Church's love and the consolation of faith, they comfort believers and raise the minds of others to God.

36. 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 viaticum, especially if the celebration is to be carried out communally. In this way they will understand more fully what has been said about the anointing of the sick and

about viaticum, and the celebration of these sacraments 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 this faith.

37. When the priest prepares for the celebration of the sacraments, he should ask about the condition of the sick person. He should take this information into account, for example, in planning the rite, in choosing readings and prayers, and in deciding whether he will celebrate Mass when viaticum is to be given. As far as possible, he should arrange all this with the sick person and the family beforehand, when he explains the meaning of the sacraments.

ADAPTATIONS BELONGING TO THE CONFERENCES OF BISHOPS

38. In virtue of the Constitution on the Liturgy (art. 63b), the conferences of bishops have the right to prepare a section in particular rituals corresponding to the present section of the Roman Ritual and adapted to the needs of the different parts of the world. This section is for use in the regions concerned once the *acta* have been reviewed by the Apostolic See.

The following are the responsibilities of the conferences of bishops in this regard:

- a. to decide on the adaptations dealt with in the Constitution on the Liturgy, article 39;
- b. to weigh carefully and prudently what elements from the traditions and culture of individual peoples may be appropriately admitted into divine worship, then to propose to the Apostolic See adaptations considered useful or necessary that will be introduced with its consent;
- c. to retain elements in the rites of the sick that now exist in particular rituals, as long as they are compatible with the Constitution on the Liturgy and with contemporary needs; or to adapt any of these elements;
- d. to prepare translations of the texts so that they are truly adapted to the genius of different languages and cultures and to add, whenever appropriate, suitable melodies for singing;
- e. to adapt and enlarge, if necessary, this Introduction in the Roman Ritual in order to encourage the conscious and active participation of the faithful;
- f. to arrange the material in the editions of liturgical books prepared under the direction of the conferences of bishops in a format that will be as suitable as possible for pastoral use.

39. Whenever the Roman Ritual gives several alternative texts, particular rituals may add other texts of the same kind.

ADAPTATIONS BY THE MINISTER

40. The minister should take into account the particular circumstances, needs and desires of the sick and of other members of the faithful and should willingly use the various opportunities that the rites provide.

- a. The minister should be especially aware that the sick tire easily and that their physical condition may change from day to day and even from hour to hour. For this reason the celebration may be shortened if necessary.
- b. When there is no group of the faithful present, the priest should remember that the Church is already present in his own person and in the one who is ill. For this reason he should try to offer the sick person the love and help of the Christian community both before and after the celebration of the sacrament. He may ask another Christian from the local community to do this if the sick person will accept this help.

c. Sick persons who regain their health after being anointed should be encouraged to give thanks for the favor received by participating in a Mass of thanksgiving or by some other suitable means.

41. The priest should follow the structure of the rite in the celebration, while accommodating it to the place and the people involved. The penitential rite may be part of the introductory rite or take place after the reading from Scripture. In place of the thanksgiving over the oil, the priest may give an instruction. This alternative should be considered when the sick person is in a hospital and other sick people present do not take part in the celebration of the sacrament.