

given the gift of healing, and still another miraculous powers: (1 Cor 12:9-10). The apostle St. James provided a clear teaching regarding the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick: “Is there anyone sick among you? He should ask for the priests of the Church. They in turn are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. This prayer uttered in faith will reclaim the one who is ill, and the Lord will restore him to health. If he has committed any sins, forgiveness will be his” (Jas 5:14-15). In all, the Church has been continually mindful of our Lord’s command, “Heal the sick” (Mt 10:8). (The Council of Trent cited these passages to refute the charges of the Protestant leaders that Christ had not instituted this sacrament and had not conferred His healing ministry to priests.)

The administration of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is also restricted to a priest because the major effect is tied to the ministry of priests, namely, the forgiveness of sins. The sacrament not only provides the sick person with the forgiveness of sins but also the completion of Christian penance (Council of Trent, “Doctrine on the Sacrament of Extreme Unction”).

Given this basis, a lay person who acts as an Eucharistic minister or “healing minister” should never give the impression that he is administering the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. He should never anoint a person with an oil, blessed or otherwise, that would suggest that he is anointing the person with the Oil of the Infirm, which is used in the Sacrament of

the Anointing of the Sick. We must never mislead a person, albeit unintentionally, into thinking that he has received the graces of this most important sacrament of healing, when in fact he has not. A person’s soul could be in jeopardy because of some symbolic anointing that does nothing.

We must be very careful never to do anything that simulates a sacrament. When a loved one is seriously ill or near death, please call for a priest, who alone can administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, which provides great graces for healing both body and soul.

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#### **Pamphlet 007**

## **Anointing of the Sick: Medicine for Sinners**

Fr. William Saunders, Ph.d

During His public ministry, Jesus healed people — the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf and mute, the hemorrhaging and the dying. His healing touched both body and soul. In most of the accounts of the healing miracles, the ill person comes to a deeper conviction of faith, and the witnesses know that “God has visited His people” (Lk. 7:16). These healings, however, foreshadow the triumphant victory of our Lord over sin and death through His own passion, death and resurrection.

The healing ministry of our Lord continues through His Church. Jesus instructed the apostles and sent them out on mission: “With that, they went off, preaching the need of repentance. They expelled many demons, anointed the sick with oil, and worked many cures” (Mk. 6:12- 13). At the Ascension scene, Jesus echoed this instruction to the apostles and declared that “the sick upon whom they lay their hands will recover” (Mk. 16:18). At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit conferred great gifts upon the Church, including healing: St. Paul recognized, “Through the Spirit one receives faith; by the same Spirit another is given the gift of healing, and still another miraculous powers” (I Corinthians 12:9-10). The Apostle St. James provided a clear teaching regarding the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick: “Is there anyone sick among you?

He should ask for the priests of the Church. They in turn are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. This prayer uttered in faith will reclaim the one who is ill, and the Lord will restore him to health. If he has committed any sins, forgiveness will be his” (Jms. 5:14-15). In all, the Church has been continually mindful of our Lord's command, “Heal the sick” (Matt. 10:8).

Various Church Fathers attest to the use of this sacrament in the early Church. St. Augustine (d. 430) wrote that he “was accustomed to visit the sick who desired it in order to lay his hands on them and pray at their bedside,” and from his writings it is probable that he anointed them with blessed oil. Pope Innocent I (d. 417), in his letter of instruction to Decentius, affirmed that the Letter of St. James clearly refers to the sacrament, the bishop must bless the oil, a bishop or priest must administer the sacrament, and the sacrament complements the sacrament of Penance, conveying the forgiveness of sin. About the twelfth century, this sacrament became commonly known as “Extreme Unction,” perhaps for two reasons: First, this anointing concluded the series of sacramental anointings during a person's spiritual life — beginning at Baptism and followed by Confirmation and perhaps Holy Orders, and concluding with Extreme Unction. Second, this anointing more and more was used for those or at the point of death.

Responding to the Protestant's denial of this sacrament, the Council of Trent decreed in

Doctrine on the Sacrament of Extreme Unction (1551), “This 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.”

The Second Vatican Council addressed the usage of the sacrament in its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (1963): “Extreme Unction,” which may also and more fittingly be called 'anointing of the sick,' is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as one of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived” (#73). Moreover, the Council highlighted the healing ministry of the Church and the salvific healing of our Lord: “Through the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of her priests, the entire Church commends the sick to the suffering and glorified Lord, imploring for them relief and salvation. She exhorts them, moreover, to associate themselves freely with the passion and death of Christ” (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #11). The Council recommended that a continuous rite be prepared which would include confession, anointing and viaticum.

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (formerly known as Extreme Unction) is administered only by a priest, or, of course, a bishop. The Catechism specifies, “Only priests (bishops and presbyters) are

ministers of the Anointing of the Sick” (No. 1516). The Code of Canon Law likewise asserts, “Every priest, and only a priest, validly administers the Anointing of the Sick” (No. 1003).

The reason for the restriction to priests is because the “anointing of the sick” and the effects of the sacrament are inherently related to the Priesthood of Christ. During His public ministry, Jesus healed people — the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf and mute, the hemorrhaging and the dying. His healing touched both body and soul. In most of the accounts of the healing miracles, the ill person comes to a deeper conviction of faith, and the witnesses know that “God has visited His people” (Lk 7:16). These healings, however, foreshadow the triumphant victory of our Lord over sin and death through his own Passion, death and Resurrection.

Our Lord entrusted His healing ministry to His apostles. He instructed the apostles and sent them out on mission: “With that, they went off, preaching the need of repentance. They expelled many demons, anointed the sick with oil, and worked many cures” (Mk 6:12-13). At the Ascension, Jesus echoed this instruction to the apostles and declared that “the sick upon whom they lay their hands will recover” (Mk 16:18). At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit conferred great gifts upon the Church, including healing; St. Paul recognized, “Through the Spirit one receives faith; by the same Spirit another is