

## **From the Pastor's Desk - Messages About the Anointing of the Sick**

### **February 1, 2004 Bulletin - From the Pastor's Desk**

ANOINTING OF THE SICK is one of the seven sacraments, which continues the apostles' ministry of praying over the sick and anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. This sacrament had its beginnings in Christ himself, and is spoken of in the Epistle of St. James. "*Are there any sick among you? Let them call for the priests of the church who will anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.*"

The prayers and actions of this sacrament impart the strength and grace of the Holy Spirit. By God's grace, the person anointed is forgiven, saved, sustained, strengthened, and even healed! The celebration of this sacrament consists in the laying on of hands by a priest, the offering of a prayer of faith, and the anointing of the sick with olive oil made holy by God's blessing. The recipient is anointed on the forehead and hands.

**Who can be anointed? Those seriously ill can be anointed, as well as those who feel the decline of health due to age, those preparing or recuperating from surgery, those undergoing serious medical treatment such as chemotherapy, and those suffering from a chronic health condition.** In other words, the sick and elderly can be anointed.

Never wait for an emergency or death to be anointed! The time to be anointed is before surgery, before hospitalization, before the end is near. Anointing is meant to heal and strengthen the sick, not to announce that death is imminent. Anointing is for the living. There is another sacrament proper to the dying.

The sacrament for the dying is what Catholics call "viaticum," which means food for the journey. It is the reception of Holy Communion by those who are approaching death. Anointing should be received long before viaticum is necessary. So anointing at the time of death is not necessary, if the person has previously been anointed and receiving Holy Communion.

What are the last rites? What we formerly called the last rites are now prayers called the *Commendation of the Dying*. These official Catholic prayers can and should be said at the deathbed of a Catholic by any layperson, pastoral minister, deacon or priest.

**The Anointing of the Sick will now be held at SFB every other month right after the Saturday evening Mass. Are you sick or elderly? Join us for the Anointing of the Sick.**

-Written by Fr. Tom Eichenberger for the SFB parish bulletin, February 1, 2004. Contact the parish office or check the parish calendar for the date of the next anointing of the sick.

## **February 8, 2004 Bulletin - From the Pastor's Desk**

There are two sacraments I have never received. One of them is the Anointing of the Sick.

The Anointing of the Sick is not called *Extreme Unction* any more. Extreme Unction literally meant "last anointing," a deathbed anointing. The Church now sees the anointing as something for all the sick, not just the dying, something that can be repeated more than once, long before the point of death arrives.

This sacrament comes to us from the apostles, who prayed over the sick and anointed them with oil in the name of the Lord. Today olive oil is blessed by a bishop or priest, and is used to anoint the forehead and hands of the recipient. This holy action and the accompanying prayer impart the strength and grace of the Holy Spirit, who makes us able to bear our illnesses and infirmities.

The elderly can be anointed every year, since they certainly feel the decline of their health, often in dramatic ways. Those seriously ill can be anointed, as well as those preparing for surgery or recovering from surgery. Those undergoing medical treatments such as chemotherapy can be anointed. Those suffering from a chronic health condition can be anointed. And the dying can be anointed.

Never wait to be anointed. If you wait till the time of death to summon a priest, most likely you won't find one. (There's a priest shortage.) It's a little sad when I come to the deathbed or have the funeral of someone who has never been anointed or received *Viaticum* in his or her old age.

When someone is moments from death, you may call the priest, but it is not necessary. If your loved one has been anointed every year in their old age, and has been receiving Holy Communion in their last years, there is not much more the priest can do. Your loved one is already in the state of grace. The priest can offer a final absolution and blessing, or recite the official Catholic prayers called the *Commendation of the Dying*, which is a rite that can be led by any deacon, sister, chaplain, or lay minister. Parishes are actually supposed to have lay ministers who are fully prepared to lead these prayers at the deathbed.

This year we will begin celebrating the Anointing of the Sick regularly at SFB, every other month, right after the 5:00 p.m. Saturday Mass. **I invite all the sick and elderly to join us and remain for the anointing after Mass.**

-Written by Fr. Tom Eichenberger for the SFB parish bulletin, February 8, 2004. Contact the parish office or check the parish calendar for the date of the next anointing of the sick.