

July 1, 2018: Understanding the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

Dear Parishioners,

Summer is upon us and I hope everyone is taking time to enjoy the beautiful weather we have in Washington this time of year.

I am often called to the hospital or to a home when someone is dying in order to administer what people refer to as the “Last rites” or “Extreme Unction”. Since Vatican Council II the Church has emphasized a more expanded understanding the Anointing of the Sick, including not waiting to request it at the last moments before death. To quote the Vatican II document on Liturgy and the Sacraments: “The Anointing of the Sick is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as anyone of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived.”

The Catechism of The Catholic Church further explains when Anointing would be appropriate: “If a sick person who received this anointing recovers his health, he/she can in the case of another grave illness receive this sacrament again. If during the same illness the person’s condition becomes more serious, the sacrament may be repeated. It is fitting to receive the Anointing of the Sick just prior to a serious operation. The same holds for the elderly whose frailty becomes more pronounced.”

Some of the benefits of receiving this Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick are that it is a sacrament of strengthening, peace and courage to overcome the difficulties with the condition of serious illness or frailty of old age. So the sacrament is not only focused on the healing of the body but, more importantly, the healing and strengthening of the soul by the Holy Spirit. The gift of this sacrament also unites the sick person to the Savior’s redemptive passion, where our suffering, united with Christ, becomes redemptive for ourselves and others.

Finally, the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick can be a preparation for the final journey. This last anointing completes the holy anointings of Baptism and Confirmation and configures us to Christ’s death and resurrection. This last anointing fortifies the end of our earthly journey for the final struggles we may have before entering the Father’s house. The last anointing can also be accompanied by prayers for the dying and with communion if the person is able to receive.

In Christ,

Father Vincent