



This past Thursday, February 11th, the universal church celebrated a world day of prayer. Specifically, it was the *World Day of Prayer For the Sick*. I thought it would be appropriate in this little column to speak about a Sacrament which is sadly often overlooked and often misunderstood: the Anointing of the Sick.

As a priest, I can't tell you the number of times that the emergency phone has gone off and the request has been made: "Come quickly! My relative has died. Come and anoint them." And while I go and say the prayers for the deceased, there's a problem. I can't give them the sacrament of the anointing at that point because they are already dead. Sacraments can only be administered to the living. I'm convinced that the reason why people don't call the priest right away is because they get the causality backwards. People think that the anointing will kill their relative!



How many times I've heard it: "don't call the priest yet. They'll die!" Well, it's the other way around! The anointing doesn't kill the person! The cancer does! They should call the priest because if the person is dying, they should receive the sacraments of healing! And this is why the Second Vatican Council stressed another

dimension of this great Sacrament. They wanted to make the point that the anointing isn't just for the dying. It's also for the sick.

In the *'Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick'* issued by his holiness Pope Paul VI on November 30, 1972, we read these words: "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 any one of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the appropriate time for him to receive the sacrament has certainly already arrived."

In other words, it is a wise thing to receive the sacrament of the sick when there is *any danger* of death from sickness or old age. Personally, I've received the holy sacrament myself several times prior to surgery and going under general anesthesia. The effects of the sacrament are so powerful that we should desperately want to receive it!

According to the Apostolic Constitution, there are various effects of the Sacrament. The grace of the Holy Spirit takes away sins if any still remain to be taken away. It relieves and strengthens the soul of the sick person, arousing in him a great confidence in the divine mercy. Being thus sustained, he may more easily bear the trials and labors of sickness, and more easily resist the temptation of the devil "lying in wait" (Genesis 3:15). Sometimes regaining bodily health, if this is expedient for the life of the soul. Additionally, if a person is in a coma, and is unable to confess their sins to a priest, this Sacrament has the effect of absolution: forgives sins! What a blessing! So don't be afraid to call the priest! Receive the holy anointing yourselves as often as you can! Personally I can't wait to get old because I'll qualify for the anointing just for being old! I don't know about you but I want my passport stamped when I go. I'm traveling first class when I get old and sick!

We should receive the anointing when we are seriously sick.

And if one is a caretaker, call the priest when your loved one begins to be seriously ill. Whatever you do, don't wait until your



relative dies! Pick up the phone and call the priest! Don't miss out on this tremendous grace because of misguided fears. Who knows, the person anointed might get better physically; but if not, one thing is certain: they will be healed spiritually.

~ Father Dort

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. - James 5:14