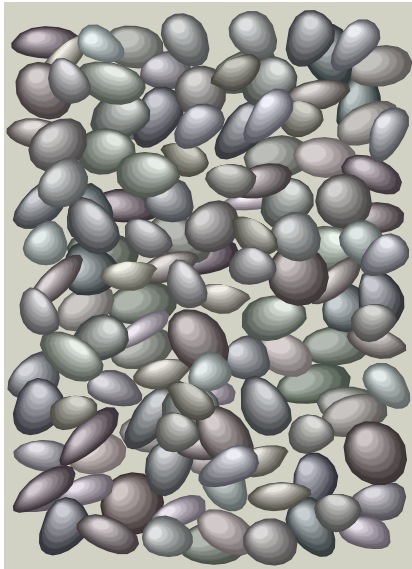


Sacraments of Healing

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, or Confession, and Anointing of the Sick, or Last Rites, are Catholic sacraments that bring healing and forgiveness to those who are in pain.

Jesus spent a fair amount of his ministry healing the sick and reaching out to those who were alienated and alone. It is clear from reading Scripture that Jesus understood that there is much more to healing than physical cures. He could sense when a person's spirit was sick and in need of healing, too. While he often cured physical problems, he also brought healing to those overcome by sin, selfishness or sadness. He invited them to experience God's love and forgiveness and he offers us that same invitation through the Sacraments of healing; Anointing of the Sick and Reconciliation.

Reconciliation



Stones...A Story

We all have shortcomings, failings, negative behavior, or rather stones in our lives. Stones are those barriers that keep us from loving and living like Jesus wants us to. The problem for Jim happened when he started stacking the stones and built a wall.

At first the wall was only ankle high. It was made of stones like selfishness, rudeness, un-cooperation, hurting a friend, stealing little things, and lying. The wall was so small that some people didn't notice it.

His family saw it, but just stepped over it. Jim kept building. He became a little more rude, less tolerant, more cynical.

Pretty soon, each family member was building his or her own wall. They'd all look at each other with anger, sadness or disappointment, but they all continued to behave in the same negative way.

One day, Jim noticed that he had built such a high wall and because of it, he was alone. He missed the time spent with his family and friends. They weren't talking, or hanging out or anything.

"What happened?" he yelled. "What happened?"

We all have stones in our lives. These stones or burdens can weigh us down or can come between us and those whom we love...family or friends. They can have a far reaching effect. In any event, we need healing.

Reconciliation is one of the sacraments of healing. The focus of the sacrament is on the stones in our lives and seeking God's forgiveness and guidance to change our behavior. We examine all our relationships...our relationship with God, with others, with ourselves and with the environment, and look for areas within those relationships that require healing.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation requires that you have true sorrow for your sins and having the desire to change. It is knowing that things are not working the way they could be—in particular, it is knowing that our relationship with others is not as life-giving or respectful as it is called to be.

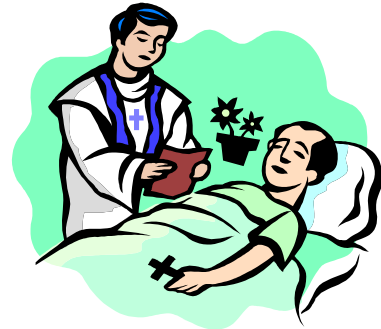


The Sacrament of Reconciliation is the process that works toward both settling conflicts and restoring relationships. There are 5 steps in the reconciliation process.

1. The first step is **become aware that we have offended.** (Examination of conscience.) We ask ourselves: How am I treating others? How am I contributing to my family's well-being? How am I following God's commandments?
2. The next step is to **admit the fault** (Confession) to our own self and if possible to the offended person.
3. We **express our sorrow (contrition)** by saying "I'm sorry"
4. If the other person accepts our apology, we are **forgiven (absolution.)**
5. After we have been forgiven we try to **change our conduct (penance.)**

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

The sacrament of Anointing, formerly called Extreme Unction or Last Rites, uses many of the same symbols that are used in the other sacraments: anointing with oil (Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders), the laying on of hands (Confirmation, Reconciliation, and Holy Orders), and Holy Communion (the Eucharist). There are three symbols/rituals in the celebration of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick—**Prayer of Faith, Laying On of Hands, Anointing with Oil**. Each one reminds us of an important aspect of our being baptized as a follower of Christ.

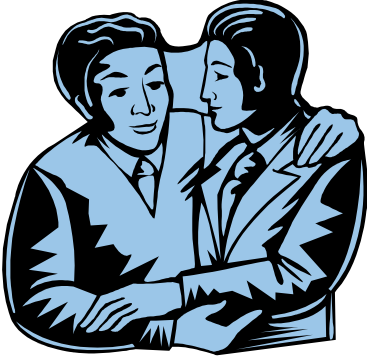


The sacrament of Anointing acknowledges the whole person, body, mind and spirit. Jesus healed because he felt compassion for hurting people.

The second Vatican Council in the 1960's re-emphasized the ancient practice of anointing with oil, laying hands on any who suffer serious illness. The sacrament is no longer thought of as the "last rites" and can be repeated as many times as necessary. The council also recommended that the sacrament be celebrated communally when possible especially within a Sunday liturgy. When the sacrament is celebrated in a home or at the hospital, the sick person's family and friends are encouraged to be present.

Praying for the sick and anointing them goes back to Jesus (healing stories) and the first Christians.

Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint (him) with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven. (James 5:13-15)



The sacrament of Anointing offers a spiritual antidote to the damaging effects of illness. Pain, suffering, and facing one's mortality can greatly undermine a person's sense of well-being, especially one's spirit. Anointing by a priest or a bishop is a statement by the whole Christian community that God's gracious concern does not leave us in times of suffering, illness, and even death. Experiences that try the human spirit need not be seen as hopeless and meaningless. In the midst of suffering, we need to hear most tenderly the healing message of Christian faith:

- God loves and cares for us when we are sick or suffering.
- God heals our spirit and gives us comfort through the love of the Christian community.
- Jesus' suffering and death were not his final fate, and neither are they for us. Jesus' resurrection gives us hope.

1. God's love and care for us when we are sick or suffering

God's loving concern for the sick, suffering, or dying people is the first and foremost truth celebrated in the sacrament of Anointing. In this sacrament the people of God seek not only to remind sick, suffering individuals among them of God's unconditional love and forgiveness, but also to reassure them that God cares about their total well being.

The sacrament of Anointing acknowledges and celebrates the wholeness of the human person, paying attention to both physical and spiritual well-being. The sacrament does address the physical bodily conditions of illness, but the primary emphasis of Anointing is to bring spiritual strength and healing to sick and dying people.

2. The healing power of the Christian community

When the Christian community brings God's compassion and love to its members who are in pain or near death, as it does through the sacrament of Anointing, the community is acting as an instrument of God's healing grace. Thus the role of the Christian community in carrying on the healing ministry of Jesus includes:

- Visiting the sick (by people of the community, priests, and pastoral ministers)
- Bringing Holy Communion to the sick
- Praying for them during Mass and at other times. The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is a central part of this overall pastoral care the Church gives to its weak and ill members.

3. Jesus' resurrection gives us hope.

The sacrament of Anointing reminds us of the hope-filled reality of Jesus' own suffering, death, and resurrection, and allows us to reaffirm our faith in that reality.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus himself suffered much mental and physical pain and was finally put to death by the terribly painful method of crucifixion. Significantly, however, the story of Jesus does not end with his Passion and death. Although Jesus' resurrection did not eliminate suffering and death from human experience, it did make clear that they are not the end of life but steps on the way to a new life.



4. Celebration of Anointing

The sacrament is celebration in three ways. The sacrament of Anointing can be celebrated with a whole faith community, either as a part of a Mass or in a separate healing service. The sacrament of Anointing can be celebrated by individuals who are seriously, but not terminally ill—for instance, by people about to undergo major surgery for an illness that is serious but not life threatening. The sacrament of Anointing can bring a special comfort and peace to those persons who suffer from a terminal illness or are close to death. Like the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, Anointing may be received by a person more than once.

In the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, Catholics are reminded of God's healing power that keeps flowing through Jesus into the Church. And they participate in the mysterious truth that—as in Jesus' life—suffering, sickness, and even death can be part of the healing journey toward resurrected life and wholeness.

SUMMARY

The Sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick are referred to as the Sacraments of healing. Both Sacraments have undergone many changes, Catholics are reminded of God's healing power that keeps flowing through Jesus into the Church. And they participate in the mysterious truth that—as in Jesus' life—suffering, sickness, and even death can be part of the healing journey toward resurrected life and wholeness.