Where sickness is involved …

- Jesus’ healing ministry
- Apostles’ healing ministry
- Healing ministry of the Church

Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praise. 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. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful (James 5: 13-16).

A brief history of Praying for the Sick

- Stage One: Primacy of prayer and faith as the source of healing.
- Stage Two: Church’s prayer located in the oil of anointing.
  - Bishop blesses the oil
  - People themselves do the anointing
- Stage Three: Focus shifts from sickness to sin and preparation for death.
  - Bishop and Priest must do the anointing.

Stage Four: The mandate from Vatican II

“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 fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived.

Vatican II and the sacrament of anointing – Key shifts

- Context: full pastoral care of the sick
- Sacrament as liturgical act: many ministers and many ministries
- for the sick, and not simply for the dying
- may be repeated during an illness
- A dead person not to be anointed
- Viaticum [communion] is explicitly named as the sacrament for the dying
A brief history of the sacrament for sinners

- Baptism – first sacrament for the forgiveness of sin
- Eucharist – second sacrament for the forgiveness of sin
- Excommunication from the Eucharist and restoration to the Eucharist
- Order of Penitence: Eucharist - the final reconciliation
  - East: restored on Good Friday
  - West: restored on Holy Thursday
  - communal form – once only.
- Celtic form – a writ of absolution after penance
- Legal form – absolution before Eucharist if in serious sin.

The mandate from Vatican II

- The rite and formulas for the sacrament of penance are to be revised so that they more clearly express both the nature and effect of the sacrament.

Vatican II and the sacrament of penance.

- Reconciliation of Individual Penitents.
  - Aims at an individual penitent, stressing a radical conversion and new beginnings.
- Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution.
  - This brings the private and the common together.
- Reconciliation of Penitents with General Confession and Absolution
  - Aims at expressing for faith that in Christ all sin is forgiven.

In dealing with the sick, three things are involved:

- The prayer of the Church
  - The presbyter alone or the presbyter leading an assembly prays the “church’s prayer.” The primary ministry of the church for the sick is to pray.
- The laying on of hands
  - A gesture of prayer (invocation of the Spirit) expressing God’s love through human touch.
- The anointing with oil
  - Another gesture of prayer (specially blessed oil) which is both soothing to the touch and which signifies the dignity of the sick person

The primacy of prayer and faith

- Two forms of prayer
  - Recognized charismatic healers who keep alive Jesus’ own healing powers.
  - Official ministers who exercise the church’s power to heal.
- The promise of healing:
  - Sometimes healing RESTORED the person to ordinary life.
  - Sometimes healing brought HUMAN COMFORT as the person prepared for life beyond death

The ritual clearly envisions a journeying with …

- from initial sickness,
- through turns of events,
- through death and even after death
- with consolation for the family and the care givers
- before turning over to the liturgy of Christian burial.
The Ritual for the sick includes:

- Visits to the sick
- Visits to a sick child
- Communion of the sick
- Anointing of the sick
- Pastoral care of the dying
- Celebration of the dying
- Commendation of the dying
- Prayers for the dead

Who are the seriously sick?

- The physically ill
  - where illness is terminal
  - seriously incapacitated – accident
  - of advanced age
  - undergoing a life-threatening operation
- The psychologically ill
  - Only if it is a help toward healing
- The spiritually ill
  - Where reconciliation, counseling and spiritual direction meet.

Who are the healers

- Doctors and hospital staff
- Ordinary chaplains – ordained or not ordained
- Volunteers who attend the sick
- Those who anoint the sick
- Those who bring Eucharist regularly
- Those who comfort the grieving

What kind of healing is possible?

- Comfort from the prayers, the presence and the touch of those who attend the sick
- Inner peace of surrender when one places the suffering with Jesus in his own suffering.
- A loving word from family and friends
- A remembering word from one’s church
- The knowledge that many are praying

In dealing with sin what is looked for by the sacrament?

- Contrition
  - A heartfelt sorrow for the sin committed and a firm intention to sin no more
- Confession
  - True knowledge of self before God
- Act of Penance
  - Steps toward rectifying the harm done
- Absolution
  - God’s mercy effectively offered
- Thanksgiving

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

- Forgiveness:
  - surrender of anger and resentment.
    - God has already forgiven each one of us
    - Can you forgive God?
    - Can you forgive yourself?
- Reconciliation:
  - restore friendly relations between
    - God has already reconciled each one to God
    - God asks us to be reconciled to each other
    - To accept, care for, and love each other
The ritual for sin also involves a journeying with …

- Contrition
  - The journey to overcome anger and resentment to oneself or another takes time and a caring companion.
- Confession
  - The journey of acknowledgement may need many ears on the way to sacramental fulfillment.
- Act of Penance
  - Serious restitution involves others as well
- Absolution
  - Both forgiveness and reconciliation require companionship

Who needs to be forgiven?

- “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, … God will forgive us.” (1 Jn 1:8) – therefore, everyone.
- Those who have a conversion of heart
- Those who seek return to the church
- Those who have spiritual needs for on-going forgiveness.

Who are the forgivers

- The primary forgiver is God through his Son Jesus Christ.
- Humanly speaking, the primary forgiver is the Church, which presents the on-going presence and ministry of Christ.
- The many people who serve in the process of healing the sinner.
- The priest who absolves; the community who reconciles.

What will happen to those forgiven and reconciled

- A realization that God cares
- Deep faith that in Christ all sin is forgiven
- Deep sense that the forgiven can also be reconcilers
- A sense of a new beginning
- A sense of welcome home
- A sense of companionship with Christ
- Forgiveness of oneself.

How can you serve?

- By recognizing yourself your need for forgiveness.
- By speaking and living the mercy and faithfulness of God.
- By dealing empathetically with the sinner.
- By creating rituals of forgiveness
- By leading people to compassionate priests for absolution.

Rituals for the sick

- Use first the many rituals contained in the Pastoral Care of the Sick
  - Use them carefully
  - Use them sensitively
  - Use them imaginatively
- Use in a variety of ways elements such as oil, laying on of hands and prayer
  - Touch is the most important in the healing process
  - Oil should be lavishly imposed
  - Prayer should always announce what is happening.
- Ask yourself: what rituals will help healing in this particular circumstance.
Rituals for the sinner

- Key to rituals for sinners is to awaken the triple sense of (a) conversion, (b) honesty and (c) sorrow.
- Key to rituals for sinners is to expect (a) a sense of forgiveness, (b) a hope for reconciliation and (c) a hope for peace.
- This can be done in private, in a community, in groups or in public.

But that now leads for time for your own reflection on the sacraments of healing and reconciliation.

You are on......

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