

Holy Unction

offered on Holy Wednesday and at other times upon request

by Phyllis Meshel Onest, M. Div.

The Sacrament of Holy Unction is offered for healing of soul and body and for forgiveness of sins. When offered during Holy Week it is part of our preparation for receiving the Eucharist at the Liturgy celebrated on Holy Thursday.

James 5:14-15 is the basis for the Sacrament: "If any is sick among you, let him call the presbyters of the Church; and let them pray over him; anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."

The rite itself calls for seven priests, seven readings from the Epistles and Gospels, seven prayers and seven anointings with oil specifically blessed for the service. (The seven anointings are done when the service is conducted for an individual.) Although it is not always possible to perform the Sacrament in this way, the normal procedure is to gather as many priests and people as possible.

Seven candles - representing the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit - are lit around the vessel containing the wine and oil. The oil which is the visible sign of God's healing Grace, symbolizes God's mercy; the wine, the Blood of Christ shed upon the Cross for our salvation. Also present is wheat which symbolizes new life in the Resurrection.

At the end of the service the priest anoints the faithful as he makes the sign of the cross on the forehead and top and palms of the hands saying, "For the healing of soul and body."

Order of the Service

1. Introductory Prayers and Psalms 143 & 51

In these Psalms we confess our sinfulness before God and ask Him to cleanse us and make a "new and right spirit within us" (**Psalm 51:10**).

2. Canon

In this series of verses that are read or sung, we ask God to show mercy upon us and cleanse our souls, to drive away all evil powers, to grant salvation to those who are sick or suffering, and to grant us the healing of our souls and bodies. At the end of several sets of verses, we ask God to renew our lives so that we may bless, thank and glorify Him forever.

3. Short Prayers or Troparia to the Saints

We pray to the saints - especially those who have helped the sick and suffering, and to those who have been martyred for the glory of God - and to the Mother of God to intercede for us for the salvation of our souls.

- The **Great Martyr Demetrios** (306 AD, Thessalonica), whose bones still exude Chrism, is famous throughout the East as a healer of the sick. Demetrios, who was in prison at the time, predicted that through his prayers Nestor would conquer the Emperor's favorite gladiator Lyaeus. The Emperor was so angered that Nestor won, he had both Demetrios and Nestor killed.
- **St. Panteleimon** of Nicomedia was a Christian physician martyred for his faith in 304 AD. He performed many miraculous cures in the name of Jesus Christ.

- **"Unmercenaries"**, the title given to those physicians who refused payment for their services, miracle-workers - **Cosmas and Damian**.

4. Epistle and Gospel Lessons and Prayers

There are seven sets of Epistle and Gospel readings and prayers.

- James 5:10-16
Luke: 10:25-37
- Romans 15:1-7
Luke 19:1-10
- I Cor. 12:27-31;13:1-8
Matthew 10:1,5-8
- II Cor. 6:16-18, 7:1
Matthew 8:14-23
- II Cor. 1:8-11
Matthew 25:1-13
- Galatians 5:22-6:2
Matthew 15:21-28
- I Thessalonians 5:14-23
Matthew 9:9-13

In some parishes the open Gospel book, which contains the accounts of Jesus' many miracles, is laid with the printed pages down upon the heads of those who are ill. By doing so it is hoped that they will also receive physical and spiritual healing and that the faith in the written word of our Lord will be strengthened in the minds of those present. Just as Christ laid His hand upon the sick when He performed His many miracles, the priest lays his hand upon the Gospel which rests on the heads of the faithful.

Each of the seven prayers asks for the remission of the our sins, for the healing of our souls and bodies and for life everlasting.

Some Things to Do

- Plan to participate in the healing Sacrament of Holy Unction as a family. Explain to your children what will happen during the service and why.
- Ask them to listen carefully for the names of the saints that are included.
- In some parishes, small bottles of oil are given to the faithful to take home. It is kept in the icon corner and used when someone is sick or in pain.

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