

# The Rite of Blessing of the Sick: An Explanation

By Bishop Liam Cary

Throughout the Gospels the evangelists highlight our Redeemer's preoccupation with the sufferings of the sick. Entering the synagogue to teach for the first time, He was met by the repulsive shrieking of "a man with an unclean spirit." To the amazement of the onlookers, Jesus promptly cast the demon out. He then proceeded to the sick bed of Peter's mother-in-law, took her by the hand, and lifted her out of her fever. Such power continued to go forth from Him to the very last night of His life, when His touch healed the sword-struck ear of the high priest's slave in the Garden of Gethsemani.

To His Church our Lord entrusted His power to heal. Through the hand of the priest in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick Jesus continues to touch those for whom the shadow of death takes the form of grave illness or old age. In the words of the Catechism, the sacrament of the sick "completes the holy anointings that mark the whole Christian life . . . .

This last anointing fortifies the end of our earthly life like a solid rampart for the final struggles before entering the Father's house."

But not every illness is deadly. Long before death begins to hover in the background, we may be stricken with suffering that is not so much "final" as it spiritual—the constant, crippling pain of arthritis; the merciless progression of Parkinson's; the un-liftable weight of depression.

In search of "courage to endure in a Christian manner" such intractable long-term suffering, those bowed down by it can turn to the Church, not for the Sacrament of the Sick, but for a powerful sacramental: the Rite of the Blessing of the Sick. In this ritual after a Scripture reading, a short homily, and intercessory prayers the priest lays his hands on those who come forward (including non-Catholics), and concludes the service with a blessing. Two important differences distinguish this rite from the Sacrament of the Sick: no anointing occurs, and the Blessing of the Sick can be repeated frequently.

As pastor in Medford, I used to offer the Blessing of the Sick monthly. It didn't take long for this disarmingly simple yet deeply moving prayer to take root in our midst. Many people came every month; others, for as long as their malady persisted. I invite you to entrust your physical or mental weakness to the healing hands of the Church and let your souls be touched by the peace which Christ the Healer greatly desires to give.

*Join us for the  
Communal Blessing of the Sick  
by Bishop Liam Cary  
on Monday 12 July at 6:30 pm  
St. Pius X – Main Church*