

Homilies on Sacraments [series 10]  
Anointing of the sick

In Mathew 10:5-8 Jesus sent out his disciples saying, 'proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons'. In the anointing of the sick Christ continues his healing ministry in and through the church. James 5:14-15 acknowledges ministry to the sick as essential to church's existence in the world, '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'. The catechism says that in illness, human life experiences weakness, limitations, anguish, despair and even revolt against God. Anointing of the sick helps encounter sickness and suffering in a mature way, search for God and turn to God who says: 'I am the Lord, your healer' [Exodus 15:26]. The readings of this second Sunday Advent express the deepest longings in our hearts, for harmony/well-being and joy. John the Baptist says, 'I am the voice of the Lord in the desert of your life, do not despair in sickness and adversities; God's grace is visiting you'.

- In the anointing of the sick, Jesus comes to us like the Good shepherd, as if carrying the wounded sheep on his shoulders to an experience of comfort and strength. In sickness, we feel a sense of being stranded; it drains our resilience. We ask: where did my joy go? Where is light? Light is inside us; sickness [darkness] persuades us to go to that light and surrender to the source of life, to God who gave us life. Anointing of the sick helps grow the attitude of Christ in sickness. Jesus did not give up his mission facing crucifixion; he redeemed pain saying, Father, thy will be done'. Jesus says to us as he told a suffering St. Paul, 'my grace is sufficient for you'.
- In the anointing of the sick we use symbols of oil and laying on of hands just as Jesus did in the gospels. Jesus heals Peter's mother in law; he took her by the hand; Jesus stretches his hand and touched the leper; Jesus touched blind man's eyes applied mud and asked him to go wash; he received sight. The woman with hemorrhage touched Jesus' garments and was healed. In all these Jesus presented himself as healer or the sick invited Jesus into their distress, pain and suffering through act of faith and trust!
- Jesus said: when you pray, you receive the Holy Spirit. Prayer of anointing of the sick says: 'through this holy Anointing may the Lord in his mercy and love help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit, release you from sin, save and raise you up'. Church council of Trent says about anointing: 'this reality is in fact the grace of the Holy Spirit, whose anointing takes away sins if any; it relieves and strengthens the soul of the sick person, giving him confidence in the divine mercy, strength to bear labors and trials of his sickness and sometimes regains bodily health'.
- In the anointing of the sick, the whole church community is present to the sick person. VTII says: by anointing, the whole church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Christ. German writer Heinrich Boll says: 'I would prefer even the worst possible Christian world to the best non-Christian world, because in a

Christian world there is room for the disabled, sick people, the old and weak; there is love for those who seemed and seem useless to a godless world'. In sickness we wrestle with God on the bed of pain, argue, question, doubt, listen, experience the light going out and pray! We are tested and learn humility and go to the depth of our being. In the anointing of the sick we spiritually rise with Christ to new way of looking at life; we enter into communion with all who suffer! It is when we encounter darkness of pain, suffering and death that we desperately need the presence of others. In anointing of the sick, the church says to the sick, 'we are with you'. There is co-presence of Spirit and community in the anointing, empowering the sick with grace on life's pilgrim journey; anointing awakens the sick person to the accompanying presence of Christ, who says, 'I am with you'.

Father Jose