

Anointing of the Sick

Priest Workshop — Diocese of Amarillo | May 8, 2026

WORKSHOP

DIOCESE OF AMARILLO



Workshop Overview

This workshop covers the theology, history, revised rites, and practical application of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. The following major topics will be addressed:

01

Brief History of Anointing of the Sick

Theology of illness and suffering, redemptive suffering, Christ the Physician, and the sacrament's development through the Early Church, Middle Ages, Trent, and Vatican II.

03

Practical Considerations

Matter and form, who can receive anointing, special cases, and case studies for pastoral application.

02

Revised Order of Anointing of the Sick

Reason for revision, structure of the Latin Typical Edition, the ritual book for priests, visitation, communion, the ordinary rite for Anointing, precept for Viaticum, continuous rite, anointing in doubt of death, and Confirmation in danger of death.

CHAPTER 1

A Theology of Illness and Suffering

Before we can understand the sacrament, we must understand the human experience it addresses — illness, suffering, and death in light of the Christian mystery.



Illness, Suffering, and the Fall

Illness, corruption, and death were **not** part of God's original plan for humanity. The Catechism teaches: *"As long as he remained in the divine intimacy, man would not have to suffer or die"* (CCC, 376). Genesis 2:17 warns: *"For in the day that you eat of it, you shall die."*

Suffering as Privation

Suffering is a result of evil — understood as a privation of some good which man does not share in. It becomes increasingly difficult when man "ought" to experience the good but does not: health, friendship, love.

Physical and Interior Pain

Pain is both exterior/physical (of the body) and interior/moral (of the soul). Physical pain is **not** a result of the fall — it signals that something is wrong. Interior pain, according to Aquinas (ST I-II, 35.1), **surpasses** physical pain. The interior/moral pain of Christ was more painful than the physical pain of the cross. When both physical and interior pain are present simultaneously, suffering is maximized.

The Experience of the Sick Person

The sick person faces a complex web of interior and exterior suffering. Understanding these dimensions helps the priest minister with greater compassion and theological depth.

Fear

"They become afraid of the God of whom they have conceived a distorted image" (CCC, 399) — a distortion rooted in the Fall.

Despair & Depression – Being a "Burden"

The weight of illness can lead to profound interior darkness, hopelessness, and a loss of meaning.

Isolation

The sick may feel abandoned by God or misunderstood by others. Bitterness and the sense that "people don't understand" are common.

Doubting God's Goodness

The question "WHY?" arises. The sick person may feel like a burden, experience purposelessness, powerlessness, sadness, and anger.

The Experience of the Dying Person

In addition to the experiences of the sick person, the dying person faces intensified and unique spiritual struggles that the priest must be prepared to address.

Remorse of Conscience

Regret from past sins and deep concern for one's salvation weigh heavily on the dying person.

Temptations to Doubt God's Mercy

Even great saints like Thérèse of Lisieux experienced profound trials of faith at the end of life.

Anxiety about Others

Concern for loved ones left behind, combined with wondering whether there is "something" after death — and the terror if there is nothing.

Intensified Fear

All the fears of the sick person are amplified as death approaches, making the Church's

Redemptive Suffering: *Salvifici Doloris*

Begins with Colossians 1:24: "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church."

Magisterial Tradition

Referenced in the first line of *Mystici Corporis Christi* by Pius XII.

Why Do We Suffer?

Made in the image of God with his intellect and will, **man** is the **only creature** that has the capacity to **question the meaning of suffering**.

Man poses the question not only to himself - but also to God. Joined to Christ's Suffering

The sufferings of the members of the Mystical Body are mysteriously joined to Christ's Passion. Man has the opportunity to become a **co-redeemer** with Christ. Baptism is foundational for understanding this truth. Christ's Passion is perfect, yet open to receive our participation.

Three Aspects of Man's Share in the Sufferings of Christ

Salvifici Doloris, nos. 19–27 articulates three aspects of participation in Christ's suffering. Man cannot avoid suffering — **the cross will find us every day** — but this inescapability becomes an opportunity for redemption.

The Cross: Way to Resurrection

We are called to participate in both Christ's Cross and Resurrection. The two mysteries are inseparable. Suffering and death become the means by which we participate in the Resurrection.

Suffering as Means for Virtue

Romans 5:3-5: "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." This entails the virtue of perseverance and hope — infused virtues of grace (SD, 23). Without growth in virtue, man will be overcome by suffering and seek comfort elsewhere.

Joined to Christ's Suffering

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Conversion: Becoming the New Man

John Paul II points to **St. Francis of Assisi** and **St. Ignatius of Loyola**, both of whom experienced profound conversion through grave illness:

"A result of such a conversion is not only that the individual discovers the salvific meaning of suffering but above all that **he becomes a completely new person**. He discovers a new dimension, as it were, of his entire life and vocation... When this body is gravely ill, totally incapacitated, and the person is almost incapable of living and acting, all the more do interior maturity and spiritual greatness become evident, constituting a touching lesson to those who are healthy and normal." (SD, 26)

This conversion occurs through a *personal* participation in the mystery of Christ's suffering — not through some abstract answer about the "meaning" of suffering. Christ does not explain suffering in the abstract; He says: "**Follow me!**" (SD, 26). As the individual takes up his cross and spiritually unites himself to the Cross of Christ, the salvific meaning of suffering is revealed — not at the human level, but at the level of Christ's own suffering.

The Good Samaritan: Responding to Others' Suffering

"Everyone who stops beside the suffering of another person, whatever form it may take, is a Good Samaritan. This stopping does not mean curiosity but **availability**."
(SD, 28)

OAS, Introduction to Visitation to the Sick, no. 43: Pastors especially, and all who care for the sick, should offer words of faith by which the sick are instructed about the significance of human sickness in the mystery of salvation. They should encourage the sick to realize by the light of faith that they are united to the suffering Christ, and that they can sanctify their sickness by prayer and, from that prayer, draw strength of soul to bear their sufferings.



Christ the Physician

Three key dimensions of Christ's healing ministry ground the sacramental tradition of Anointing of the Sick.



No Hasty Identification with Sin

Jesus does not equate illness with punishment for sin. In John 9:1-3, when asked about the man born blind, He answers: *"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him."*



Healing the Whole Person

Jesus cared for the sick and suffering, healing and redeeming the whole person — body and soul. Matthew 4:23-25 records that He healed "every disease and every infirmity among the people," including demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics.



External Signs of Healing... foreshadowing SACRAMENTS!

Jesus heals using external signs: spittle and laying on of hands (Mk 7:32-36), mud and washing (Jn 9:6-7), and physical contact (Lk 6:19): *"Power came forth from him and healed them all."* The imposition of hands in the sacrament derives from this action of Jesus.

Anointing in the Early Church

The codification of the seven sacraments did not occur until the Council of Florence (1439). In the Early Church, the practice of anointing the sick developed organically from James 5:13-16.

Blessing of Oil by the Bishop

Oil was presented by the faithful and blessed during the Eucharist by the bishop — much as today during the Chrism Mass. Only the prayer of blessing of oil is found in the Early Church; no ritual of anointing the sick exists separately. The oil derived its efficacy from the bishop's blessing.

Sources: *Apostolic Tradition* (215) and the *Emitte Prayers* (400s).

Lay Use of Blessed Oil

The faithful took blessed oil home and used it on themselves and other sick members — by drinking or external application.

Sometimes prayers preceded or accompanied the anointing, but the emphasis was on the anointing itself, not the prayer. The anointing was **repeatable**.

The recipient was anyone among the faithful (not penitents) who was sick.

Minister and Effects

The minister could be a lay person, priest, or bishop. Pope Innocent (416) and Venerable Bede (735) distinguish lay anointing from presbyteral anointing — the latter considered more properly sacramental. The expected results were healing of the whole person, body and soul: removal of disease, exorcism of unclean spirits, means of grace, and remission of sins.

The Middle Ages: Minister and Recipient

Minister: Priestly Anointing Becomes Exclusive

Twelfth-century theologians almost unanimously held that the Apostles — through James — instituted "Extreme Unction." Aquinas argued Christ instituted all sacraments, promulgating this one through the Apostles via Mark 6:6-7 and 6:13. Since the sacrament was instituted by Christ and promulgated by the Apostles, and given the increased emphasis on remission of sins, it is proper to the **priest** to be the minister. Aquinas rejects lay and diaconal conferral. The Council of Florence states explicitly: "*the minister of this sacrament is the priest.*"

Recipient: Deathbed Anointings

With the shift toward bedside Penance and Anointing, the norm became anointing those **dying** rather than those with general or serious illness. Aquinas states the sacrament is only for those who believe death is approaching. The Council of Florence: "*This sacrament may not be given except to a sick person whose life is feared for.*" Children were excluded due to their need for intellectual devotion and their lack of sin associated with sickness. The sacrament should not be repeated if the illness has remained the same; it may be repeated after recovery or a new serious relapse.

Middle Ages: Ritual Development

The application of oil was to the senses and other areas of the body where illness was located. Aquinas argued the senses needed anointing because the sacrament remedied sin for the final moments of life, and the senses are the origin of all knowledge. The **Council of Florence** specified the parts to be anointed:

"He is to be anointed on these parts: on the eyes on account of sight, on the ears on account of hearing, on the nostrils on account of smelling, on the mouth on account of taste and speech, on the hands on account of touch, on the feet on account of movement, on the loins on account of the pleasure seated there." (Denzinger, no. 1424)

Aquinas also defended **olive oil** as the matter: it "penetrates to the very heart of a thing, and spreads over it" — symbolizing grace entering the heart gently to foster hope. He states the sacrament is *perfected* through the oil consecrated by the bishop. The form used was: *"Through this holy anointing and his most pious mercy, may the Lord pardon you for whatever offenses you have committed by sight"* — confirmed by the Council of Florence.

Middle Ages: Effect of the Sacrament

The principal effect of the sacrament became explicitly established in the late Middle Ages as the dispensation of grace upon the soul, especially in preparation for death.

Principal Effect: Spiritual Healing

Aquinas states the principal effect of Extreme Unction is a "spiritual healing or cure" — the "immunity from disorder which is needed by those who are taking their departure from this life and setting out for the life of glory."

Bodily Healing: Extraordinary

Aquinas acknowledges that when Christ instituted the sacrament in Mark 6, the apostles healed those they anointed. However, unlike Baptism, the anointing does not affect the body by a natural property of the oil. If bodily health is restored, divine power has worked in an extraordinary way. Bodily healing does not always occur unless essential for greater spiritual healing.

Sins Remitted

The sacrament cannot remove original sin or mortal sin (which remove spiritual life). It strengthens the man whose spiritual life is weak. Grace pours into the soul and necessarily removes sin, since grace is incompatible with sin. Even where no sin is present, the "remnant of sin" is removed. The Council of Florence: *"The effect is the healing of the mind and, as far as it is good for the soul, of the body as well."*

Council of Trent: Effect of the Sacrament

The Council of Trent affirmed the same recipient and minister as the Middle Ages, and gave a definitive account of the sacrament's effects with reference to the Epistle of James. The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* states: "*Its purpose must have been a supernatural one, curing souls, rather than a merely natural one, using oil to cure bodies. This is the unanimous teaching of St. Denis, St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory the Great.*"

1

Removal of Sin

The anointing takes away sin and anything that remains of sin from the soul.

2

Comfort and

Confidence

Confidence strengthens the sick person with greater confidence in the Lord's divine mercy.

3

Strength against Evil

The sick person better bears suffering and resists the temptations and works of the enemy — especially at death, when the Enemy "strains more vehemently all the powers of his cunning to ruin us utterly" (Trent, 1694).

4

Sometimes Bodily Health

The Council acknowledges that the sacrament sometimes effects physical healing when beneficial for the salvation of the sick person's soul — contra Luther, who reduced the effect to solely physical healing.

Second Vatican Council: Effect of the Sacrament

Lumen Gentium, no. 11b: "By the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of her priests the whole Church commends the sick to the suffering and glorified Lord, asking that He may lighten their suffering and save them; she exhorts them, moreover, to contribute to the welfare of the whole people of God by associating themselves freely with the passion and death of Christ."

OAS, no. 6 identifies the grace of the Holy Spirit as the sacrament's gift, by which the whole person is: **(1)** helped toward salvation, **(2)** lifted up by the faithfulness of God, and **(3)** strengthened against the temptations of evil and the anxiety of death. If necessary, the sacrament also brings forgiveness of sins and the completion of Christian Penance. If beneficial for salvation, physical healing may occur.

-  The primary effect = grace of the Holy Spirit to associate oneself to the Passion and Death of Christ, fight temptation and evils, and be comforted in the anxiety of death.

Vatican II: Four Graces of the Sacrament

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (nos. 1520–1523) articulates four graces of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick:

1520 — A Particular Gift of the Holy Spirit

Strengthening, peace, and courage to overcome the difficulties of serious illness or old age. Renews trust and faith in God; strengthens against the temptation to discouragement and anguish in the face of death. Leads to healing of the soul, and of the body if such is God's will.

1521 — Union with the Passion of Christ

The sick person receives the strength and gift of uniting himself more closely to Christ's Passion — consecrated to bear fruit by configuration to the Savior's redemptive Passion. Suffering acquires a new meaning: participation in the saving work of Jesus.

1522 — An Ecclesial Grace

The sick who receive this sacrament contribute to the good of the People of God. The Church intercedes for the sick person, and he, through the grace of this sacrament, contributes to the sanctification of the Church and to the good of all men.

1523 — Preparation for the Final Journey

The Anointing completes our conformity to the death and Resurrection of Christ, just as Baptism began it. It completes the holy anointings of 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."

Vatican II: The Form Changed

The Second Vatican Council shifted the emphasis of the sacramental form from forgiveness of sins to the **grace of the Holy Spirit**, reflecting the fuller theology of the sacrament's effects.

New Form (Post-Vatican II)

*"Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the **grace of the Holy Spirit**."* R. Amen.

"May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up." R. Amen.

Old Form (Medieval / Tridentine)

"Through this holy anointing and his most pious mercy, may the Lord pardon you for whatever offenses you have committed by sight" — and similarly for each of the other senses.

The emphasis was on the remission of sins committed through each sense organ, reflecting the late medieval focus on preparation for death.

- ❏ The new form retains forgiveness of sins but places the primary emphasis on the grace of the Holy Spirit — consistent with the fuller theology articulated in Vatican II and the Catechism.



The
ORDER
of the
ANOINTING
OF THE SICK
and of their
PASTORAL CARE

CHAPTER 2

The Revised Order of Anointing of the Sick

Reason for Revision: *Liturgiam Authenticam*

Liturgiam Authenticam (May 7, 2001): *For the Right Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.*

LA, 6 — Need for Improvement

Ever since the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the work of translating liturgical texts into vernacular languages has involved the publication of norms and advice to Bishops. Nevertheless, it has been noted that translations in various localities stand in need of improvement through correction or through a new draft.

LA, 7 — A New Era of Liturgical Renewal

It is now necessary to set forth anew the principles of translation to be followed in future translations — whether entirely new undertakings or emendations of texts already in use. The Instruction envisions and seeks to prepare for a new era of liturgical renewal, consonant with the qualities and traditions of the particular Churches, but which safeguards also the faith and the unity of the whole Church of God.

Structure: Previous vs. Current

Edition

The Latin Missal Edition has been substantially reorganized. The 2026 edition reflects a clearer distinction between the sick and the dying, and a more logical ordering of the rites.

Previous Edition (1983)

- I. Visit to the Sick
- II. Visits to a Sick Child
- III. Communion to the Sick
- IV. Anointing of the Sick (outside/within Mass; hospital)
- V. Celebration of Viaticum
- VI. Commendation of the Dying
- VII. Prayers for the Dead
- VIII. Rites for Exceptional Circumstances

Current Edition (2026)

- I. The Visitation and Communion of the Sick
- II. The Order of Anointing of the Sick
- III. Viaticum
- IV. The Order of Offering the Sacraments to a Sick Person in Imminent Danger of Death
- V. Confirmation in Danger of Death
- VI. The Order of Commendation of the Dying
- VII. Various Texts to Be Used in the Rites for the Sick
- Appendix I. Model Rites for the Visitation of the Sick

A Ritual Book Specific for Priests

The previous edition of *Pastoral Care of the Sick* was for use by priests, deacons, and laity who minister to the sick — all within one ritual book. The revised Order is for use **primarily by priests**.

"The Latin typical edition, however, is a ritual book for use by a priest (*sacerdos*). Throughout the new editions, the subject of the rites is 'Priest,' not 'celebrant' or 'minister.'" (*Committee on Divine Worship*, Newsletter, September 2025)

Deacons

A deacon may celebrate the rites in Chapters I and III, and both deacons and lay persons may use Chapter VI and Appendices I–III.

Lay Persons

For Communion and Viaticum to the sick, lay persons must use *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery outside Mass* (cf. OAS, no. 29).

Practical Benefit

Without having to decipher different options for priests and laity within one book, the priest can navigate the rites more clearly and confidently in pastoral situations.

Guide to the Revised Order of Anointing of the Sick – Handout

What Sacraments are Needed???

The Condition of the Sick or Dying Person
will determine the use of the Ritual.

Sick Person

Chapters I and II

Dying Person

Chapters III and IV

Sick vs. Dying: The First Question

The first and most important pastoral question when approaching a sick person is: **Is this person sick or dying?** The answer determines which chapter of the ritual to use. In all cases, there is an exhortation for the Sacrament of Penance to occur if necessary.



Chapter I: The Visitation and Communion to the Sick

Pastoral Situation

Big Joe has already received anointing this week by the Parochial Vicar without you knowing until you get there...

Chapter I: The Visitation and Communion to the Sick

A. Visitation of the Sick

The revised edition includes an exhortation to care for the sick. Model examples for visitations of the sick are found in Appendix I (nos. 260–276). This material corresponds to what was Chapter I in the old form of the ritual.

B. Preparation for Communion

OAS, no. 48: "A table covered by a linen cloth, upon which the Sacrament should be placed. If customary, a vessel of holy water with a sprinkler or a small branch appropriate for sprinkling should also be provided, along with candles on the table." After placing the Sacrament on the table, the Priest and all present adore it (no. 49).

Communion to the Sick: Key Changes

Several notable changes appear in the revised Communion rite for the sick.

Penitential Act Translation

1983: "Lord Jesus, you healed the sick; Lord Jesus, you forgave sinners; Lord Jesus, you give us yourself to heal us and bring us strength."

2026: "You gained salvation for us by your Paschal Mystery; You never cease to renew among us the wonders of your Passion; You make us sharers in your Paschal Sacrifice through the reception of your Body."

Expanded Reading Options

1983 offered 5 reading options (no. 84); 2026 offers 9 options (no. 53). The translation for Showing the Most Blessed Sacrament now matches the Roman Missal translation.

Chapter II: Anointing of the Sick

Pastoral Situation

You just received a call the your top sacristan and daily communicant Big Joe was just diagnosed with cancer. It's not good but it's okay... He already went to mass that morning and asks if he could come to the parish office to receive the anointing.

What Happened to the Hospital Rite?

Importance of the Sick or Dying Person's Participation... *Ex opere operato* and *Ex opere operantis*

"Faith is expressed in the Sacred Anointing, which is bound up with the prayer of faith (cf. Jas 5:15). This faith must first be stirred up both in the one who administers the Sacrament and especially in the one who receives it. For the sick person's faith will save them, as will the faith of the Church, which looks to the Death and Resurrection of Christ from which the Sacrament draws its efficacy." (OAS, Introduction, no. 7)

Sacrosanctum Concilium, No. 7: Christ Present in the Liturgy

"Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass... especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'"

Christ indeed always associates the Church with Himself in this great work wherein God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified. The Church is His beloved Bride who calls to her Lord, and through Him offers worship to the Eternal Father.

Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members.

The Ordinary Rite: Preparation

Sacrament of Penance First

OAS, no. 65: "Whenever it is necessary, the Priest should agree to hear the sacramental confession of the sick person, if possible, immediately before the celebration of the Anointing." If confession must occur within the rite, it takes place during the Introductory Rites. Otherwise, the Penitential Act takes place.

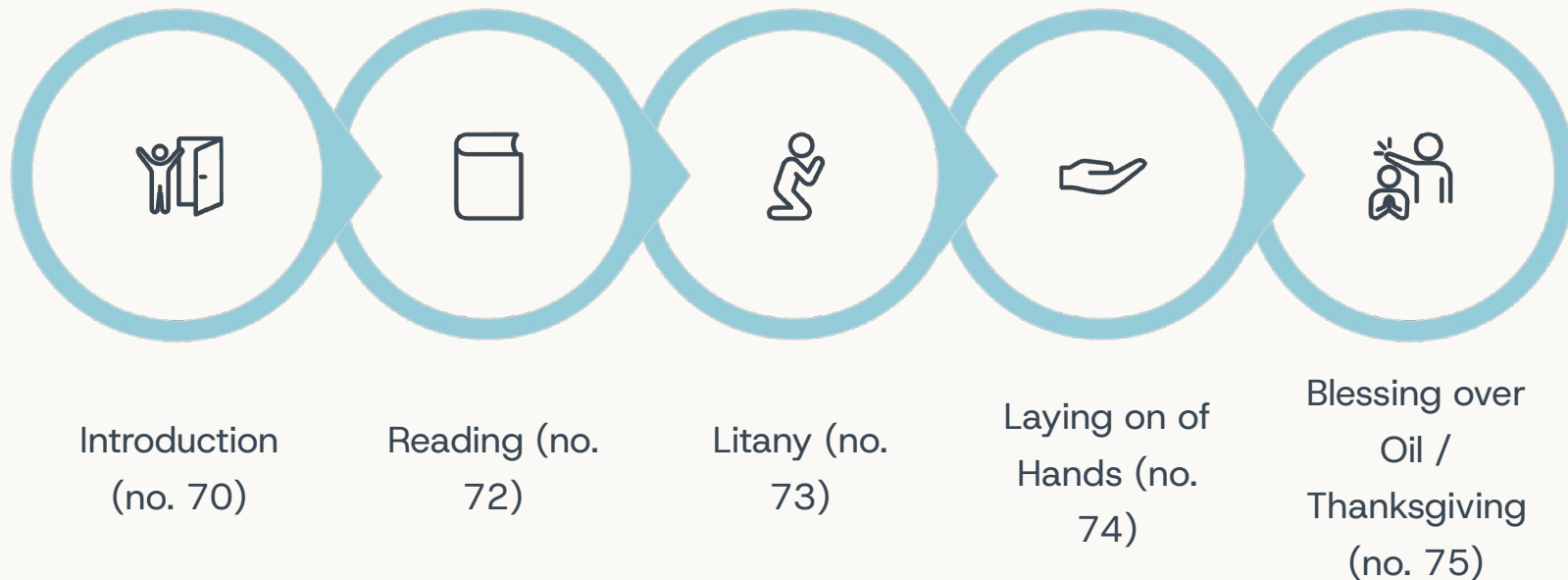
Large Gathering

The same rite is used for a large gathering: "the laying on of hands and the anointing with its formula is done on each person individually, but other texts are recited only once in the plural" (OAS, no. 67).

Vestments

OAS, no. 68: "Wearing vestments appropriate for this sacred ministry." The Ceremonial of Bishops, 661 specifies: "The bishop wears over an alb a pectoral cross, stole, and white cope and he uses the miter and pastoral staff. Presbyters who may join him wear a stole over a cassock and surplice or over an alb."

The Ordinary Rite: Order of Celebration



The Litany may take place after the reading, after the anointing, or at some other suitable place. The Our Father follows (no. 78). If the sick person is receiving Communion, proceed to nos. 55–58. If not, conclude with no. 79, noting the parenthetical instruction for the concluding blessing if the Priest has hosts in a pyx.

The Laying on of Hands and Anointing

Laying on of Hands (no. 74)

"Then the Priest lays his hands upon the head of the sick person, without saying anything." This gesture recalls Jesus' manner of healing: "They brought the sick with various diseases to him; and he laid hands on every one of them and healed them" (Luke 4:40). It is the epiclesis of the early Church — calling forth the Holy Spirit upon the sick person.

The Sacred Anointing (no. 76)

The sacrament is administered by anointing the forehead and hands with olive oil or, if opportune, another vegetable oil (Paul VI, *Sacram unctionem infirmorum*, 1972). In case of necessity, a single anointing on the forehead — or another suitable part of the body — suffices, with the whole formula pronounced. The form emphasizes the grace of the Holy Spirit, connection to forgiveness of sins, and James 5.

What Happened to the Hospital Rite?

In a hospital or institution, a Priest who confers the Anointing upon a large number of sick persons in separate rooms may omit certain aspects of the rite: the reading from Sacred Scripture (no. 72), the Litany (no. 75), and the Prayer of Thanksgiving over the Oil (no. 75A) (cf. no. 67).

 These omissions are permitted only in the specific context of a hospital with many separate rooms. The importance of these elements must not be underestimated.

"Faith is expressed in the Sacred Anointing, which is bound up with the prayer of faith (cf. Jas 5:15). This faith must first be stirred up both in the one who administers the Sacrament and especially in the one who receives it. For the sick person's faith will save them, as will the faith of the Church, which looks to the Death and Resurrection of Christ from which the Sacrament draws its efficacy." (OAS, Introduction, no. 7)

Anointing Within Mass

The Mass to be celebrated is "For the Sick" (*The Roman Missal*, Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions, no. 45). This is considered essentially a **Ritual Mass**.

When Ritual Mass Is Prohibited

Ritual Masses are prohibited on Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter; on Solemnities; on days within the Octave of Easter; on All Souls' Day; on Ash Wednesday; and during Holy Week. When prohibited, anointing is still possible with, if appropriate, the formula for the final blessing (OAS, 81).

Vestment Color and Readings

Vestment color: White. Readings are taken from the *Lectionary for Mass* (nos. 790–795) or from the Order of Anointing, unless the advantage of the sick and those present suggests other readings (OAS, no. 81).

Order within Mass

Anointing is conferred after the Gospel and Homily (OAS, no. 82): Litany (if not done after anointing / Universal Prayers) → Laying on of hands → Blessing of Oil / Prayer of Thanksgiving over the Oil → Anointing.



CHAPTER 3

Viaticum: Ministry for the Dying

Viaticum — the Eucharist given to the dying — is the Church's supreme gift to those departing this life. The importance of preparing for death, the grace of a happy death, and the gift to loved ones of dying well are the pastoral foundations of this ministry.

- ① Can. 911 §1: The pastor, parochial vicars, chaplains, and superiors of clerical religious communities have the **duty and right** of bringing the Most Holy Eucharist as Viaticum to the sick.

Chapter III: Viaticum

Pastoral Situation

Big Joe's family calls and let's you know he's going to be placed on hospice. He was just anointed yesterday. His condition is basically the same. You are going to visit him to bring him communion... Viaticum...

Precept for Viaticum

"The pastor and the other Priests who are entrusted with the spiritual care of the sick should ensure that the ill who are in imminent danger of death will be strengthened by the Sacred Viaticum of the Body and Blood of Christ. Hence, pastoral preparation should suitably take place, both of the sick person and of their family and of those who take care of them, according to the circumstances and persons present." (OAS, no. 93)

The faithful in danger of death are **bound by precept** to receive Holy Communion. This is not merely a pious option but a serious obligation of the Church's pastoral care. The priest must be proactive in ensuring that those in imminent danger of death receive this sacrament.

Administering Viaticum: Confession and Apostolic Pardon

Confession Before Viaticum

OAS, no. 100: The Priest should be attentive to whether the sick person wishes to confess. If so, hear confession before Viaticum if possible. If confession must occur within the rite, it takes place at the beginning. If necessary, the confession may be **generic** (OAS, no. 104): Priest: "Are you sorry for your sins?" Sick person: "Yes, Father."

The Apostolic Pardon

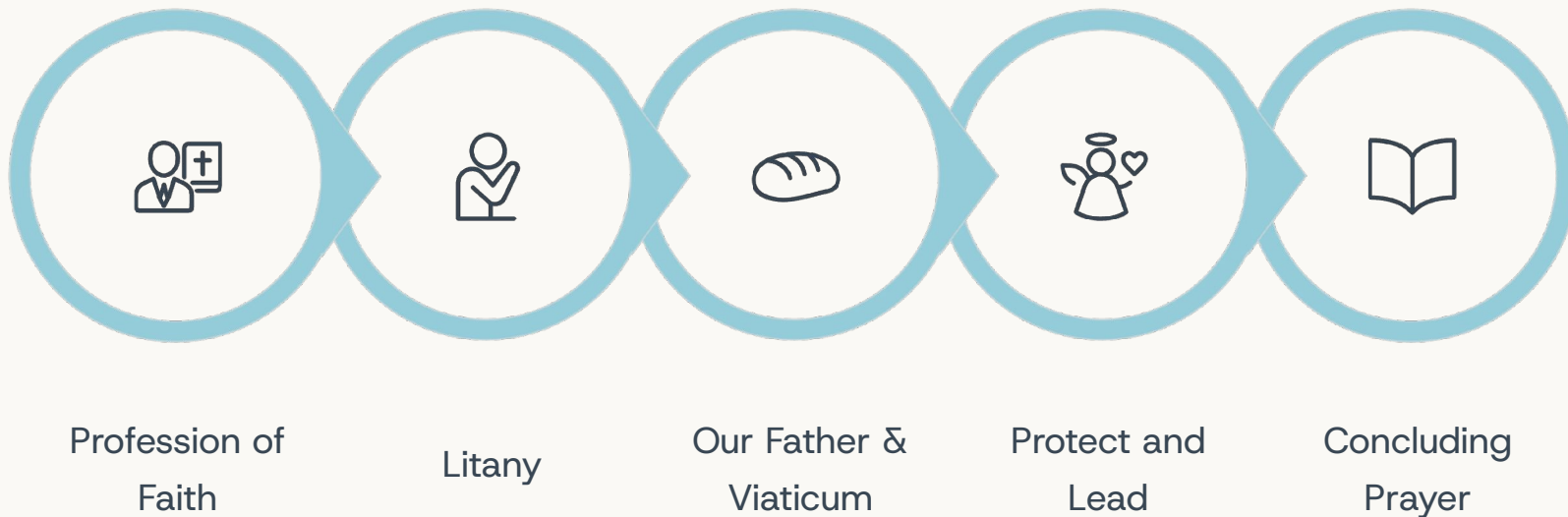
OAS, no. 106: "The Sacrament of Penance or the Penitential Act may be concluded with a plenary indulgence at the moment of death, which the Priest grants to the sick person."

Manual of Indulgences (1999), no. 12 §1: "A priest who administers the sacraments to someone in danger of death should not fail to impart the apostolic blessing to which a plenary indulgence is attached."

If a Priest Is Unavailable

Manual of Indulgences (1999), no. 12 §2–3: Holy Mother Church benevolently grants a plenary indulgence at the point of death to the Christian faithful who are duly disposed and have been in the habit of reciting some prayers during their lifetime. The use of a crucifix or cross is commendable in obtaining this indulgence.

Order of Viaticum Outside Mass



A statement is added to the distribution of Communion — immediately or after distribution: *"May he protect you and lead you to eternal life."* This addition in the 2026 edition emphasizes the eschatological dimension of Viaticum as the pledge of the resurrection and the food for the final journey.

Chapter IV: Continuous Rite

Pastoral Situation

Big Joe has a sudden decline or someone finds out that they have a diagnosis for aggressive cancer

The Continuous Rite: Penance, Anointing, and Viaticum

When danger of death seems immediate, Viaticum should be offered to the sick person immediately, so that in their passage from this life, strengthened by the Body of Christ, the sick person may be fortified by the pledge of the resurrection (OAS, no. 116).

1

Confession / Penitential Act

Hear sacramental confession if the sick person wishes. If within the rite, at the beginning. Plenary Indulgence (Apostolic Pardon) follows.

2

Profession of Faith & Laying on of Hands

Following the Profession of Faith, the Priest lays hands on the head of the sick person.

3

Anointing

Blessing of Oil or Prayer of Thanksgiving over the Oil, followed by the Sacred Anointing with its formula.

4

Our Father, Viaticum, Concluding Prayer

Viaticum is given with the statement: "May he protect you and lead you to eternal life." Concluding prayer and blessing follow.

Chapter IV: Continuous Rite (without Viaticum

Pastoral Situation

You just got a call and Big Joe got stung by a wasp and is extremely allergic... He's intipated and it's not looking good...

Anointing without Viaticum in Danger of Death

When Viaticum cannot be given — for example, if the person has already received Communion that day or if the Eucharist is not available — the rite of Anointing without Viaticum is used.

Different Prayer (no. 119)

A different introductory prayer is used, adapted to the situation of anointing without Viaticum in danger of death.

Concluding Prayer (no. 128)

Following the Anointing, the concluding prayer is said (no. 128).

Our Father and Blessing (no. 129)

The Our Father follows the concluding prayer, and the rite concludes with the blessing (no. 129).

Anointing When There Is Doubt Whether the Person Is Still Alive

"If the Priest doubts whether the sick person is still alive, he should confer the Anointing in this way." (OAS, no. 135)

If the Person Has Already Died

"A Priest called to a sick person who has already died should beseech God for them, so that God may absolve them from their sins and mercifully admit them into his Kingdom; but the Priest should not administer the Anointing." (OAS, no. 135)

If There Is Doubt

Can. 1005: "This sacrament is to be administered in a case of doubt whether the sick person has attained the use of reason, is dangerously ill, or is dead." The rite is envisioned as immediately approaching the sick person and offering the introduction and anointing without the laying on of hands.

Confirmation in Danger of Death

The priest has the faculty to confirm in danger of death. **Chrism is required.**



OAS, no. 117: "If possible, Confirmation in danger of death and the Anointing of the Sick should not be conferred in a continuous rite, lest the different Sacraments be confused, since an anointing takes place in both."

If it is necessary to confer Confirmation within the Continuous Rite, the order is as follows:

01

After Profession of Faith and Litany

The laying of hands on the head of the sick person that would occur before Anointing is **omitted** (OAS, no. 124).

03

Conferral of Confirmation

The **right thumb** with Chrism makes the Sign of the Cross on the forehead: "*N., BE SEALED WITH THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.*" (OAS, no. 136)

02

Consecratory Prayer

The priest proceeds with extended hands and the consecratory prayer, followed by the Laying on of Hands with Prayer (OAS, no. 136).

04

Blessing of Oil and Anointing

The priest continues with the Blessing of the Oil of the Sick or the Prayer of Thanksgiving over the Oil, then proceeds to the Anointing (OAS, 126–127).



In case of extreme necessity: "it is sufficient that the anointing with Chrism be done with the sacramental form: *N., BE SEALED WITH THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.*" (OAS, no. 137)

The Order of Commendation of the Dying

This rite can be used by laypersons. It includes readings and prayers to accompany the dying person in their final passage.

Litany of the Saints

OAS, no. 145: "If a dying person can bear a longer prayer, it is recommended that those present pray for him, reciting the Litany of the Saints (or some invocations from it) with the response 'pray for him/her,' making special mention of the Saint or Patron Saints of the dying person or of the family."

Prayer of Commendation

The Prayer of Commendation is of particular importance, commending the soul of the dying person to God's mercy as they prepare to depart this life.

Reading of the Lord's Passion

OAS, no. 224: "Readings from the narrative of the Lord's Passion may also be read if appropriate, as on Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, or on Friday of the Passion of the Lord, or in the Votive Mass 'The Mystery of the Holy Cross.'"

Practical Considerations

Matter and form, eligibility, special cases, and pastoral application of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.



Matter and Form: Oil, Anointing, and Multiple Priests

Oil Used

Olive oil or another vegetable oil (Paul VI, *Sacram unctionem infirmorum*, 1972). When the Priest blesses the oil within the rite, after the celebration, whatever remains of the blessed oil should be absorbed with cotton and burned by fire (OAS, Introduction, 22).

Anointing

It is sufficient to anoint any part of the body for validity. Normally the forehead and hands are anointed. In case of necessity, a single anointing on the forehead or another suitable part of the body suffices, with the whole formula pronounced.

Two or More Priests

When two or more priests are present, nothing prevents one from saying the prayers and carrying out the Anointing with its formula, while the others distribute among themselves the other parts of the rite. Furthermore, each may lay hands on the sick person (OAS, Introduction, 19).

Who Can Receive Anointing? Seriously III

Sacrosanctum Concilium uses "danger of death" rather than "imminence of death," shifting the focus from **time** to **severity** of illness.

"By every effort and diligence this Sacred Anointing is to be conferred on the faithful who because of sickness, mental illness, or age are seriously ill. As to judging the gravity of the illness, it is enough that a prudent or probable judgment concerning it be made, any anxieties set aside, and if the situation warrants, the advice of a doctor be considered." (OAS, no. 8)

The Latin word *periculose* ("seriously") is used in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and by Paul VI. The English connotation of "danger" as meaning "soon" or "proximate" may have contributed to a misunderstanding. The sacrament should be given to anyone whose health is seriously impaired; however, **it should not be given indiscriminately** to those whose health is not seriously impaired (OAS, no. 8, footnote).

- ❏ The revised edition inserts "mental illness" between "sickness" and "age" in the introduction (no. 8), updating the previous U.S. book's paragraph at no. 53.

Repeatability of the Sacrament

"The Sacrament may be repeated if the sick person recovers after having received the Anointing, or if, as the same sickness continues, there is a more serious relapse." (OAS, no. 9)

Standard for Repetition

The sacrament may be repeated when: (1) the sick person recovers and then becomes seriously ill again, or (2) the same illness continues but there is a more serious relapse. It should **not** be repeated simply because time has passed or the person remains in the same condition.

The Elderly: Special Case

OAS, no. 11: "The Sacred Anointing may be conferred on people of advanced age whose strength has been much weakened, even if serious illness is not apparent." The question of repeatability for the elderly under this standard requires pastoral discernment — the weakening of strength itself becomes the basis for anointing.

Surgery, Children, and Use of Reason

Surgery

OAS, no. 10: "Before a surgical procedure the Sacred Anointing may be given to the sick as long as serious illness is the reason for this procedure." There is no specific rubric about anesthesia as a standard for allowance of Anointing.

Children with Use of Reason

OAS, no. 12: "The Sacred Anointing should also be administered to children at that early age when they have attained such use of reason that they may be comforted by this Sacrament. When there is a doubt whether they have attained the use of reason, the Sacrament should be conferred." Note: the standard is **use of reason**, not age.

Infants / Before Use of Reason

The Sacrament should not be administered to children before the use of reason. The first sacrament to confirm in these cases is Baptism. In cases of serious illness and imminent danger of death, Confirmation may be conferred — the priest has this faculty by law in danger of death. Can. 1004 §1: "The anointing of the sick can be administered to a member of the faithful who, having reached the use of reason, begins to be in danger due to sickness or old age."

Those Who Are Unconscious

"The Sacrament should be conferred on the sick who, although they have lost consciousness or the use of reason, would as believers have desired the Sacred Anointing while they were mentally fit." (OAS, no. 14; cf. CIC, 1006)

The key criterion is the **presumed desire** of the person as a believer. Pastoral discernment is required regarding those who have requested euthanasia or assisted suicide.

- ⊗ CDF, 2020: A person who has decided upon a gravely immoral act and willingly persists in this decision manifests an absence of proper disposition for the reception of the Sacraments of Penance, Anointing, and Viaticum. Such a person can receive these sacraments only when the minister discerns readiness to take concrete steps indicating a modification of their decision. A person registered in an association to receive euthanasia or assisted suicide must manifest the intention of cancelling such registration before receiving the sacraments. The priest could administer the sacraments to an unconscious person *sub condicione* if, on the basis of some signal given by the patient beforehand, he can presume his or her repentance.

Persons with Disabilities

"Since disability does not necessarily indicate an illness, Catholics with disabilities should receive the Anointing of the Sick on the same basis and under the same circumstances as any other member of the Christian faithful." (USCCB, *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, 2016, nos. 34–35)

Sufficient Use of Reason

The Anointing of the Sick may be conferred if the recipient has sufficient use of reason to be strengthened by the sacrament.

Lost Use of Reason

If the sick person has lost the use of reason and would have asked for the sacrament while in control of his or her faculties, the sacrament may be conferred.

Doubt about Use of Reason

If there is doubt as to whether the sick person has attained the use of reason, the sacrament is to be conferred. The principle of *in dubio pro sacramento* applies.

Other Scenarios: Christian Initiation...

Pastoral Situation

Case Studies: Applying the Rite

Three case studies illustrate the practical application of the revised Order of Anointing of the Sick.

Case 1: Mr. Bob — Prostate Cancer

Mr. Bob was just diagnosed with prostate cancer. He is a daily communicant at your parish. He is seriously ill but not in imminent danger of death.

→ **Chapter II: The Order of Anointing of the Sick — Ordinary Rite**

Case 2: Mr. Green — Will Not Make It Through the Night

A family member called for a hospital visit because Mr. Green will not make it through the night. He is in imminent danger of death.

→ **Chapter IV: The Order of Offering the Sacraments to a Sick Person in Imminent Danger of Death — Continuous Rite of Penance, Anointing, and Viaticum**

Case 3: Francis — Baby in the NICU

Francis is a baby in the NICU who will likely not survive after surgery tomorrow. He has not yet attained the use of reason.

→ **First:** *Order of Baptism of Children — Order of Baptism for One Child.*
→ **Then:** *Order of Confirmation — Confirmation outside of Mass (adapted), OR Chapter V: Confirmation in Danger of Death.*

Key Pastoral Principles: A Review



Suffering Has Redemptive Value

Suffering united to Christ's Passion is not meaningless. The priest's ministry helps the sick person discover this truth personally — not as an abstract answer, but as a vocation to follow Christ.



Know the Rite

The revised Order (2026) is a priest-specific ritual book. The first question is always: sick or dying? The answer determines which chapter to use. Penance should always be offered when necessary.



The Sacrament Heals the Whole Person

The primary effect is always spiritual — grace of the Holy Spirit, union with Christ's Passion, forgiveness of sins, strength against evil. Bodily healing is a secondary effect when beneficial for salvation.



Be the Good Samaritan

Availability, not curiosity, defines the pastoral response to suffering. The priest who stops beside the suffering of another person — whatever form it may take — is a Good Samaritan (SD, 28).



The Theology of the Sacrament: A Synthesis

The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is the Church's continuation of Christ the Physician's healing ministry. It addresses the whole person — body and soul — in the most vulnerable moments of human life. Rooted in James 5:13-16 and developed through two millennia of theological reflection, the sacrament offers:

- The grace of the Holy Spirit to associate oneself to the Passion and Death of Christ
- Strength against the temptations of evil and the anxiety of death
- Forgiveness of sins when necessary
- Physical healing when beneficial for salvation
- Union with the suffering and glorified Lord through the prayer of the whole Church

The Revised Order: Key Takeaways for Priests



Priest-Specific Ritual Book

The 2026 edition is for priests. The subject throughout is "Priest," not "celebrant" or "minister."



First Question: Sick or Dying?

Sick → Chapters I and II. Dying → Chapters III and IV. Always offer Penance when necessary.



Matter and Form Unchanged

Olive oil or vegetable oil; forehead and hands; single anointing sufficient in necessity. The form emphasizes the grace of the Holy Spirit.



Viaticum: Duty and Right

The pastor has the duty and right to bring Viaticum to the dying. The faithful in danger of death are bound by precept to receive Holy Communion.

Confirmation in Danger of Death: Quick

Reference

The priest has the faculty to confirm in danger of death. **Chrism is required.** If possible, do not confer Confirmation and Anointing in a continuous rite to avoid confusion. If necessary:



☐ In extreme necessity: a single anointing with Chrism and the sacramental form suffices (OAS, no. 137).

Closing Prayer and Reflection

"By the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of her priests the whole Church commends the sick to the suffering and glorified Lord, asking that He may lighten their suffering and save them; she exhorts them, moreover, to contribute to the welfare of the whole people of God by associating themselves freely with the passion and death of Christ." (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 11b)

The priest who ministers to the sick and dying stands in the place of Christ the Physician. Armed with a rich theology of suffering, a clear understanding of the revised rites, and a pastoral heart formed by the Good Samaritan, he brings the healing presence of the Church to those who need it most. May this workshop strengthen your ministry to the sick and dying in the Diocese of Amarillo.

DIOCESE OF AMARILLO

PRIEST WORKSHOP — MAY 8, 2026