

Unction of the Sick A Church Sacrament

1- Objectives

- ❖ Describing the origin and meaning of the sacrament and how to participate in it.
- ❖ Introduction to the sacrament's service prayers.

2- References

- ❖ "Sacraments of the church" by HG Bishop Mettaos
- ❖ http://www.copticchurch.net/topics/thecopticchurch/sacraments/5_unction_sick.html
- ❖ "Fit Body, Fit Mind? Your Workout Makes You Smarter. How can you stay sharp into old age? It is not just a matter of winning the genetic lottery. What you do can make a difference" by Christopher Hertzog, Arthur F. Kramer, Robert S. Wilson and Ulman Lindenberger. From the July 2009 Scientific American Mind.

3- Biblical Scripture

- ❖ "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14-15).

4- Lesson Outlines

- ❖ The seven Sacraments of the Church are the channels by which we receive the graces and blessings of the Holy Spirit Who works in the church through the Sacraments, giving us His gifts, blessings and comfort. And teaching and guiding us to the way, the truth and the life.
- ❖ Sacraments can be divided like physical medicine into 3 groups; as St. John Chrysostom once said, "Are you a sinner? Go to the Church which is a hospital not a court". In the church, you will find the spiritual physician who is the priest. Tell him your sins, as he accurately examines everything and prescribes the appropriate cure.
- ❖ Preventive like Vaccination includes Myron as the Holy Spirit dwells to fortify, help and provide victory in spiritual struggles. also, Matrimony that protects against adultery.
- ❖ Curative like medicines prescribed for a diagnosed disease includes Baptism, Repentance and Confession, Eucharist and Unction of the sick.
- ❖ Supplementary like vitamins includes Myron, Eucharist, Unction of the sick and Priesthood.

Sacrament of the Unction of the Sick

- ❖ Instituted by the Lord Jesus when He said to His disciples, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers" (Matthew 10:8), and, "Whatever city you enter ... heal the sick who are there" (Luke 10:8). The Apostles then put the Lord's words into practice: "They anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them" (Mark 6:13).
- ❖ Our teacher St. James the Apostle advised believers to practice it, by saying, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick,

and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:14-15).

- ❖ It is called the ‘Sacrament of Lamps’, for the early Christians used to place oil in a lamp, from which hung seven other lamps. Each lamp was lit at the beginning of every prayer. This rite still exists; however, the seven lamps were replaced by seven wicks, made from cotton wool, which sit in a plate of oil. The number seven signifies the seven spirits of God, which are mentioned in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 3:1). Symbolically, the number seven is a sign of perfection or completion.
- ❖ The Spirit of God dwells and sanctifies the oil in order to heal those anointed by it. It is advisable that the wicks be placed in the sign of the cross, in the plate of oil. “Jesus went about doing good and healing all those who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 1:38), as Malachi prophesied about Him saying, “But to you who fear My Name, the Son of Righteousness shall rise with healing in His wings” (Malachi 4:2).
- ❖ Our fathers the Apostles practiced it according to the orders of their Master, as the Bible says, “So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them” (Mark 6:12,13).

The Necessity of Confessing before partaking of the Sacrament The Mind/Soul-Body association

- ❖ The lame man at Bethsaida, who had been sick for 38 years, Our Lord said to him, “Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you” (John 5:14).
- ❖ When the people lowered the paralytic man down from the roof top on a stretcher, the first words the Lord said to him was: “Your sins are forgiven”, then, “Arise, take up your bed and walk” (Matthew 9:2-6).
- ❖ This doesn’t mean don’t seek Medical care—but simply that it would not be enough; A patient who relies only on medicine, denies himself the ability of God to heal him, just like King Asa, of Judah: “Asa became diseased and his malady was very severe, yet in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians” (2 Chronicles 16:12-13).
- ❖ King Asa was contrary to the good King Hezekiah who was close to death, and prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly until the Lord sent Isaiah the prophet to him saying: “Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears, surely I will heal you. On the third day, you shall go up to the house of the Lord. And I will add to your days fifteen years” (2 Kings 20:1-6).
- ❖ Sickness is both physical and spiritual; The physician may advise the patients to rest, in order for them to have a quick recovery, just as Joshua advised: “Severe sickness is gone by sleep” (Sirach 31:2), but most of all, it is necessary to plead to God in order for them to receive healing and the regaining of health (Sirach 38:14).
- ❖ This is why this sacrament is performed in people’s homes, mostly during Holy Lent, although there may not be a specific sick person there, but for true repentance and healing of our souls.
- ❖ Usually sickness in old age and Alzheimer’s is more common for those who are inclined to depression and anxiety and anger, all symptoms of the soul that confession can get rid of: Science today is discovering that there is a mind-body connection; Increased physical activity and exercise would maintain cognition by reducing risk of diseases associated with cognitive decline.

General Unction of the Sick or “Andeel” on the last Friday of Lent

- ❖ It is a known fact that all sacraments are accomplished in the Church, with the exception of the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick; as the sick may be too weak to come to church so the priest performs it at his house. However, once a year the Church performs this Sacrament in the Church, and it takes place on the last Friday of the holy Lent (that is, the Friday before Passion Week) and it is called the ‘General Andeel’.
- ❖ The General Andeel serves the purpose of reminding people of the importance and significance of the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick, for the healing of every believer and a very good chance for those believers who did not have the chance to call the priest privately at home.

Rite of prayers of the Sacrament

- ❖ There are seven prayers coinciding with the seven lamps or cotton wicks; the order of the prayers is very old and traditional. Church history mentions that St. Epifanius, Bishop of Cyprus, wrote and organized these prayers. In addition, St. Basil confirms that the ‘Andeel Prayers’ were well known in the Church from the early days (Canon 91).
- ❖ Done early in the morning to ensure everyone participating is fasting.
- ❖ As the Andeel oil is holy oil, upon which the Holy Spirit came, it is important not to leave it sitting in the plate in case it is accidentally spilled. The oil, after prayers, should be placed in a small bottle, and that the plate is wiped with cotton wool and burnt together with the cotton wicks, which were used during the Andeel prayers.
- ❖ We notice in the Rite of the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick, that there are a great quantity of readings from the Holy Bible (7 Pauline, 7 Psalms, and 7 Gospels, apart from all the prayers and supplications). These readings and prayers are a great source of consolation, patience, endurance, peace, and comfort, as well as providing the gift of healing that is accomplished in God’s time. The sick person then feels he can surrender himself to God, and so his feelings of worry and anxiety are replaced with peace and calm, for “Whatever things were written before, were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).
- ❖ The priest says the Blessing and concludes with the Lord’s Prayer then he anoints the sick person with oil with signs of the cross, in the name of the Holy Trinity on his forehead (center of senses and thoughts), upper chest (Hearts for out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23) and hands (Instruments of work and deeds).
- ❖ The sick person must receive Holy Communion as soon as possible, after partaking in the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick, for Holy Communion is the essence of life.
- ❖ The sick person must endeavor to anoint himself with the oil for seven consecutive days, believing in the power of God, and the power of prayer. This perseverance shows his faith in the effectiveness of the Sacrament, and his obedience to the church rite. Faith and obedience are essential ingredients for recovery. Just as the sick perseveres in taking medicine for their recovery, so too must they be diligent in anointing themselves with oil.

The importance of Faith for the participants in this sacrament

- ❖ The sick person and his relatives must have strong faith in the work of God in this sacrament. For example, the two blind men who had strong faith that the Lord Jesus Christ would heal them (Matthew 9:28). Also, remember the faith of Jairus (Luke 8:50), the faith of the father who had an epileptic son (Mark 9:23), the faith of the friends of the paralytic man (Matthew 9:2), and the faith of the bleeding woman (Luke 8:48).
- ❖ The sick must have faith and confidence in the priest, just as he has trust in his doctor.
- ❖ At times the sick person may not recover quickly after the Sacrament or may take a long time to heal, and at times the sick person may even die. We have to believe that God fulfill our request in due time according to His will.
- ❖ Lack of faith of the sick person may prevent the miracles to happen; just like the people of Nazareth, where the Lord Jesus “did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58). The Lord taught us that, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6) and “Do not be afraid, only believe, and she will be made well” (Luke 8:50). Also, the Lord said to the two blind men who asked Him to open their eyes, “Do you believe that I am able to do this? ... then He touched their eyes” (Matthew 9:28). Similarly, the Lord said to the father who asked Him to heal his sick son, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes” (Mark 9:23).
- ❖ Sometimes the sick person may not be worthy of being healed due to his evil doings and reluctance to repent and return to God, who says, “Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding” (Jeremiah 3:22).
- ❖ Death of the person is not necessarily an indication that they are not faithful and redeemed. It may be just the next step of God’s will for them and the perfect ending of pain.
- ❖ Sickness may be for chastisement and God may abolish it when its purpose is accomplished, just like Moses’ sister, Miriam, was struck by leprosy when she spoke badly against Moses. Then Moses prayed for her saying: “Please, heal her, O God, I pray!” and the Lord said to him, ‘Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and after that she may be received again’” (Numbers 12).

5- Conclusion

- ❖ The church asks for the healing but surrenders the whole matter to God. “If you wish to raise him from sickness sometime later, grant him help to endure without complaint. And if you want to receive his spirit, may this be by the hands of the luminous angels who rescue him from the devils of darkness” (this is part of the prayer of the Rite of Unction of the Sick). As Jesus said: “Father, take this cup away from me, nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will” (Matthew 26: 39).

6- Activities / Discussion Points

Does the church reject medical healing? What about magicians and Sorcerers?

- ❖ The church admits medical healing and approves it; consulting a doctor for healing, following his advices and medication, is acceptable and praised by the church, as all the medicine that doctors give to patients are made of herbs that God made for human

benefit, for whatever God created, it must “be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good and nothing to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving”. (1 Timothy 4: 3, 4).

- ❖ “My son, don’t neglect yourself if you get sick, but pray to the Lord and He heals you. Refrain from iniquities and amend your deeds. Purify your heart from sin... then make a place for the physician as the Lord created him and does not leave you, as you need him. Physicians have a time of success (healing)” (Sirach 38: 9-14).

- ❖ **Seeking magicians and sorcerers:** The church completely rejects the faithful patients to seek magicians and sorcerers for healing, as this means, they seek the devil, and it means they powerfully believe the devil for healing and they undervalue the power of God to heal them. St. Paul says, “Some will depart from the faith, giving head to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1).