



## No 2. Suffering and Christian Faith

Suffering and illness are part of life. As Christians, our faith helps us grasp more deeply the mystery of suffering, and bear our pain with courage. We are united with Christ who shared in human suffering and pain but ultimately triumphed over death. In a true sense we share in his passion knowing that we will also share in that eternal glory which is to come.

Christ is our companion in our suffering. He showed great love and compassion for those who were sick and cured them of their illnesses of mind and body. His words *I am with you always* (Matthew 28:20) offer consolation. As followers of Christ we can bring the healing touch of Christ to those who suffer.

### **Christ is our companion in our suffering.**

Sickness and suffering cannot be regarded as a punishment for our sins. Christ always showed compassion and mercy to those in need, never condemnation. Good health is a blessing: we actively seek the blessings of good health so that we may live fully as Christ's disciples and serve others.

The Church commends the use of medical skills to combat disease and alleviate suffering. Above all, the Church upholds the sanctity of human life.

Pastoral care of the sick is a ministry that has a special place in the Church. St James reminds the faithful to pray over and anoint the sick in the name of the Lord (James 5:14-15). As disciples of Christ, we extend pastoral comfort and support through visitation and by taking communion to the housebound.

These acts of kindness and prayer unite those who are sick with the local community. The faithful continue to pray, especially at Sunday Mass, for those who are absent through sickness. Parishes also have times when they celebrate the anointing of the sick within Mass.

### **Acts of kindness and prayer unite those who are sick with the local community.**

In times of serious illness the sacrament of anointing is celebrated. Those who are seriously ill need the special help of God's grace at this time. These rites are led by the priest in the home, the hospital or other place in the presence of family and friends. Through the laying on of hands, the offering of the prayer of faith and the anointing with oil the whole person is sustained and strengthened. The sacrament is a sign of the love of Christ and his Church for those who suffer.

### **In times of serious illness the Sacrament of Anointing is celebrated.**

In addition to the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick – the sacrament for the sick- there is the Sacrament of Viaticum. Viaticum means 'food for the passage' indicating that this rite is celebrated when death is close. It is the last sacrament of Christian life.

As followers of the Christ who suffered for us, we embrace the reality of suffering and death in our own lives as we look forward to the greatness of eternal glory.

### **Some commonly asked questions**

Can people be anointed more than once in their lifetime?

**Answer:** The sacrament can be repeated in times of serious sickness.

What do we mean by serious illness?

**Answer:** This would include operations which require an anesthetic, periods in hospital and long or intensive periods of convalescence. It may be physical or mental illness.

Do you have to be sick to be anointed?

**Answer:** Aged and frail people may also be anointed.

Can children be anointed?

**Answer:** Yes, if they have some understanding of the sacrament and would be strengthened by the celebration.

When should you receive the sacrament?

**Answer:** The Church indicates that the sacrament should not be delayed if a need is determined.

What about 'the last rites'?

**Answer:** The term 'last rites' is not used because the sacrament is primarily for the sick, not the dying.

Can you receive the sacrament if you are unconscious?

**Answer:** If the person would have desired the anointing the sacrament may be conferred.

Can you receive viaticum after death?

**Answer:** If a person has died viaticum is not given. However, there are special prayers that would be prayed for the person who has died.

Who can anoint the sick?

**Answer:** A priest confers this sacrament. Deacons and lay ministers may give communion.