

BULLETIN -- NOVEMBER 15

Tuesday, November 17, we are celebrating our annual **Mass with the Anointing of the Sick at 10 a.m.**, followed by our monthly Seniors' lunch. Some have in the past incorrectly called this a "healing Mass." While physical healing might well take place at any time by God's design, that is not the primary purpose of the Anointing of the Sick. This sacrament is intended to conform the person being anointed to the suffering Christ, so that the illness or condition under which they are laboring becomes a prayer and an intimate sharing in the redemptive suffering of Christ himself. In that way, a *spiritual* healing comes about which is of far greater importance for both the individual and for the Church.

To be clear about a couple points of terminology: Anointing of the Sick is one and the same sacrament which has in the past been called *Extreme Unction*, meaning "the final anointing," after the sacramental anointings during one's life at baptism, confirmation, and holy orders (where applicable). It was sometimes incorrectly thought that the sick person had to be *in extremis* or "at the point of death" in order to be eligible for this sacrament. While the sacrament should not be trivialized and administered for sniffles and hangnails, "serious illness" might include diabetic difficulties, painful arthritis, cardiovascular problems, Parkinson's, cancer therapies, and any number of other illnesses. A serious addictive condition might well qualify one for the sacrament, and also Alzheimer's or other dementias.

Recently, we had a question about what constitutes the Last Rites. Do these include the Anointing of the Sick? Yes, the so-called "Last Rites" (a popular term, not the correct liturgical name) include the sacraments of penance, anointing of the sick, and Eucharist (Holy Communion or, if death is imminent, *Viaticum* or "food for the journey). Then there are specific prayers of commendation for the dying and the apostolic blessing, in which the priest represents the Bishop of Rome in offering the dying member of the Body of Christ a blessing and plenary indulgence. In other words, the universal Church gathers at the bedside of its dying member and gently "throws the book" at him or her by offering every possible means of grace at these most important moments of life. No member of the Church should be deprived of these graces, and of the intimate companionship with Christ which they represent.

Note that we mentioned the sacrament of penance, or confession, as part and parcel of the "Last Rites." Unfortunately, it often happens that by the time the priest is called, the person is in no shape to recall or verbalize the sins they have committed since their last confession. In all too many cases, I'm afraid many years might have elapsed since they last approached Christ in that sacramental way. The answer to this is, DON'T WAIT! Don't put off the sacrament of penance until you can no longer humbly confess your sins. There is no danger of this if you are regular in your practice of this wonderful sacrament. Let Christ thrill and comfort you with his words of forgiveness and absolution, and let him do it often. He wouldn't have left us the sacrament of penance if he didn't intend for us to use it; and anyone who DOES can't understand why so many people carelessly neglect it.

Anyone interested in serving as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion must first be approved by the pastor and then receive training approved by the Diocese of

Grand Rapids. Candidates must be confirmed Catholics living a life in accord with Christ's call to holiness. Practically speaking, that means (among other things) that a married candidate must be in a marriage recognized by the Church; and that an unmarried candidate must not be cohabiting as if married, or involved in an habitually unchaste relationship. Other qualities are left to the judgment and discretion of the pastor. Please call the pastor (454-6025) to arrange a brief interview; and once approved, call the Diocese of Grand Rapids (243-0491) to find out the schedule for training. We are in need of parishioners who can both assist in church and bring Communion to the homebound.

Drop by the school library and see the dining room outfit, table, four chairs, china cabinet, and a full set of china and silverware. We're doing a silent auction on it. The whole set will go to the highest bidder through a system of sealed bids. Pick up an envelope and card from the table, and write your name, address, and phone number on it, along with your bid for the whole set. (Individual items will not be sold separately.) Mark "Bid" on the envelope and drop it through the mail slot on the front of the parish office / convent or through the milk chute on the back of the rectory. The bids will be opened in the library at 11 a.m. on Sunday, December 6 (St. Nicholas Day). Meanwhile, come in and look, take all the pictures you want, check out comparable deals on eBay or craigslist. A tithe of the purchase price will be given to the parish. It could be an ideal Christmas gift for someone in your family, or for newlyweds you might know. God bless you!

A challenge overheard. A speaker I heard recently rather passionately stated that no one ever tells a joke about Mother Teresa, because such jokes do not exist, they simply are not told about people who spend their lives in perpetual service to others. Leave it to this columnist to have heard a joke featuring Mother Teresa. I wanted to call in to the radio show the speaker was on, but speaking on the phone is no longer one of my strong points. However, here's the story:

The line was long, the recently deceased winding their way up the stairway of infinity all the way to the Pearly Gates. Suddenly a fellow came winding his way back *down* the stairs, looking quite mournful, and he encountered a friend who had known him to be a wonderful companion and, to all appearances, a genuinely good man.

"Joe," the friend said, very startled, "what on earth, er, what in heaven, er, well, you know what I mean. Why are you coming back *down*? I should think if someone like *you* doesn't have a chance to get in, the rest of us are doomed, er, damned, er, well, you know what I mean."

"Yes, that's kind of what I had hoped," the man mused sadly. "I was almost there. There was only one person ahead of me. Just my luck, it was Mother Teresa, and I overheard God say to her, 'You know, you *really* should have done more.' I left on my own."

Thanks be to God, we only recount this as a humorous story, not as theology. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: A friend is someone who knows your PAST, believes in your FUTURE, and accepts you as a PRESENT from God.