

Homily: 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday: Cycle B: 2024: Lv 13:1-2, 44-46; Ps 32: 1-2, 5, 11; 1 Cor 10: 31 – 11:1; Mt 1:40-45

***“The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick”***

As we celebrate this last Sunday before Lent begins this year, it is also traditionally, February 11<sup>th</sup>, the World Day of Prayer for the Sick, in honor of our Lady of Lourdes; so, considering that, and the Gospel today in which Jesus heals the man with leprosy, I am going to reflect upon the meaning of the Sacrament of the Sick, while asking Our Lady of Lourdes for her special prayers.

1. **The Mystery of human sickness and how we deal with it:** in the readings this weekend we see the various responses of humans to the Cross of sickness in its various forms in this earthly life. In the Old Testament reading we see that in the face of leprosy, in which there was no cure at the time, the need to separate the healthy from the sick. It might seem cruel to us now this separation or quarantine, but it was necessary so the whole community wasn't infected with leprosy – we have all dealt with this with Covid since 2020. Once Jesus comes, there is a different dynamic as He as God will sometimes heal those who have leprosy and other contagious diseases, but Jesus always will point out that those who are sick need to first repent of their sins to rid themselves of the spiritual sickness that sin causes which is more serious than physical sickness. We in the modern world are blessed with so many advances in medicine which has helped us overcome or cope better with physical sickness, but even then it doesn't always work, and **the temptation in the modern world** is to forget about the deeper sickness in our souls which comes from sin and in which we have a remedy in the Sacrament of Confession – in humility receive it regularly - but the Lord in His kindness also gives us the Anointing of the Sick Sacrament to help us in our sickness of body and soul. The Lord's kindness toward us humans truly is amazing – if only we open our eyes and hearts to that reality!
2. **Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, through the Catholic Church, to help those who are battling a serious illness or who are on the verge of death.** Some of you may remember years ago that the Anointing of the Sick was only given right before a person was going to die, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council back in the early 60's broadened the use of this Sacrament *for any Catholic who is seriously ill, getting ready to have major surgery or who has been greatly weakened in general by old age*. It

also can be given to people who are suffering from serious mental and/or emotional illness, or chronic physical illness. **Only a bishop or a priest can give this Sacrament, not a deacon.** Children who have arrived at the use of reason can also receive this Sacrament if they are seriously ill. Those who are unconscious because of illness or a serious accident can be given this Sacrament - if it is discerned that if conscious, they would ask for it. In that case they would also be forgiven their sins by the Sacrament of the Anointing – in case they die before waking up; but if they become conscious again, they need to go to Confession to confess their sins in the normal way we do as Catholics.

3. **What are the effects of the Sacrament of the Sick?** The first effect is that the Holy Spirit gives extra spiritual strength to the person who receives this Sacrament to bear any suffering they go through with Jesus, so it becomes redemptive for the good of their soul and the souls of others. Secondly the Holy Spirit gives to those who receive this Sacrament, with faith, a deep inner peace, the strength to fight against anxiety/despair and the temptations of the evil one, and the courage to know that the Blessed Trinity is with the person in the depths of their soul in whatever they go through in terms of sickness and suffering. Thirdly the Holy Spirit also occasionally heals people physically through this Sacrament - if it is for the good of their soul – remember the Lord is always looking out for our spiritual good in light of eternity. If we are not healed physically, it doesn't mean the Lord loves us less than some person who may be healed physically, but rather He sees that if we bear these sufferings in union with Christ it will lead to a greater spiritual good for us and other people who we offer our sufferings for. **The ways of God's Providence are very mysterious, but we need to trust Him.** He knows what is best for us on all levels. Fourthly the forgiveness of sins - if one is unconscious and can't go to Confession, as I mentioned earlier. Fifthly if it is toward the end, the grace to get ready to pass over from earthly death into eternity, in union with Jesus in His Passion and Cross. **What a spiritual gift this Sacrament of the Anointing is:** not something to be afraid of receiving, but take advantage of this Sacrament, when we need it, by contacting the local priest wherever you live and doing the same for your loved ones. May the Lord have mercy on us all in our human frailty, strengthening us in His grace as we move toward eternity, of which the upcoming holy season of Lent will remind us of. God bless you.