

ANOINTING WITH OIL FOR HEALING

“They set off to preach repentance... and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.” (Mark 6 v 3)

There are three fundamental questions that every Christian needs to ask him or herself concerning the Ministry of Healing:

- 1. Do I believe that when Jesus walked this earth 2,000 years ago he healed the sick?**
- 2. Do I believe that after Jesus was crucified he rose from the dead and is alive through his Spirit today?**
- 3. Do I believe Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever?**

A STUDY OF THE LETTER OF ST JAMES

(Chapter 5 v 14-16)

v.14: “If one of you is ill he should send...”

The sick person, or someone on his/her behalf has to do something and take the initiative.

v.14: “...he should send for the elders of the Church.”

Christians who are sick need the Church’s Ministry of healing. All too often it is regarded as the last resort when everything else seems to have failed. In the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches ‘elders’ are priests. Note that this word ‘elders’ is plural – stressing the corporate nature of the Healing Ministry. It should be the business of the whole church.

v.14: “... and they must anoint him with oil.”

In the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches the communal aspect of anointing is emphasised by the fact that the oil for anointing is blessed at the Mass of Chrism by the bishop as chief representative of the local church. Anointing is not an individual gift but a corporate gift, whereby the whole body of Christ’s Church expresses its calling to join in the healing work of Jesus.

v.14: “... in the name of the Lord”

The name of the Lord is invoked as being the authority, the one through whom this prayer and anointing is performed. It is done with faith in the Lord, for he is always the healer. Many people today want a magic solution rather than God. A monk of the Eastern Church wrote: *“The name is nothing*

without the presence... the presence of Jesus is the real content and substance of the Holy Name. The name both signifies Jesus' presence and brings its reality." (See Mark 16 v 19-20)

v.14: "... and pray over him."

St James does not here say 'pray for' or 'pray with' but 'pray over' – which implies surrounding a person in prayer. When we pray over another we try to imagine how Jesus is lovingly touching that person and ask for Our Lord's presence to flow through our hands.

v.15: "The prayer of faith will save the sick man."

Bishop Maurice Maddocks summed this up as "*the prayer of the trusting, hopeful, expectant people of God.*" This prayer of faith encompasses a whole range of healing. The Holy Spirit will always guide us to pray for wholeness in a person's life, but we need to be open to the possibility that total health might only be accomplished in the next life. God alone can see the total picture of our lives.

How do we discover the way the Lord wants to heal a person?

The Revd Tommy Tyson said, "*I give one ear to the sick person and the better ear to the Lord.*" We listen to the sick person and listen to Our Lord, praying in the way the Spirit leads. We can pray for more of the life of God to enter into that person so that he or she becomes as whole as possible and then leave it to God, realising this does not exclude death - full union with Jesus.

v.15: "If he has committed sins he will be forgiven, so confess your sins to one another."

The phrase suggests that if sin is seen as being the cause of illness, the sick person, having been anointed and prayed over, may confess his or her sins that they may be forgiven.

The healing of the paralysed man (Mark 2 v 1-12) identifies healing with forgiveness. The man knew he was a sinner and because of that he had convinced himself that God was his enemy. Because he thought God was his enemy he was paralysed and ill. Once Jesus had brought to him the forgiveness of God, he knew he was right with God and he was cured. Sickness may well not have been caused by sin, but sin places an obstacle to full healing – e.g. bitterness, resentment, refusal to forgive or the desire to keep receiving the special attention from others that sickness brings. All of these obstacles need to be removed before we experience true healing.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation (or Confession) is a very important part of the total ministry of healing and reconciliation. This is particularly so for the healing of emotional problems, for pain and for inner healing - e.g. for those who have had abortions and those who have dabbled in occult practices - as well as for many others.

v.16: "Pray for one another."

In the Ministry of Healing people leave something of their pain on those ministering to them, who in turn may absorb it. Ministers become like blotting paper and there is a cost involved; they need to support each other by prayer in union with the Church on earth, the Church in Paradise and the Church in Heaven. It is important to see this ministry not as private, but as the Ministry of the Father by Jesus through his Spirit in the Church and the world.

v.16: "This will cure you."

In concluding this Bible study we are called to heal as Jesus heals – to be his hands in the world. The Healing Ministry is concerned with people being made whole in body mind and spirit. It begins at the point of need and leads on to everlasting life. We come for Christ's healing touch. May we experience it and show that loving power of serving Christ in our brothers and sisters.

OIL

- ❖ ...is a recognised remedy for ailments throughout the world; the Good Samaritan poured it onto the wounds of the traveller to Jericho. (*Luke 10 v 34*)
- ❖ ...is a sign of God's healing and his love. 'Christ' means 'Anointed one', so in being anointed the sick person becomes one with Jesus Christ.
- ❖ ...is a sign of hope and symbolises the way in which the Holy Spirit is at work to heal the whole person – physically, mentally and spiritually.
- ❖ ...is a sign of good relationships and reminds us to expect physical healing, emotional healing of fears, anger or guilt and healing of relationships with the living and the dead. In ancient times guests were welcomed by being anointed with oil; note that Simon the Pharisee neglected to anoint Jesus. (*Luke 7 v 46*)

HOLY ANOINTING WITH SACRAMENTAL OIL

Holy anointing, or Unction, with the Holy Oil blessed by the bishop. is a sacrament of the universal Church. For far too long its use was confined solely to the dying and known as *'Extreme Unction'* or *'The Last Rites'*. However, whilst it is still used in that situation, we have now rightly returned to its fuller scriptural use and are encouraged to be generous with this wonderful gift from God. In this simple rite a priest prays with a person for healing and makes the sign of the Cross on their forehead and open palms.

"By this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy fill you with the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen

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

The rite of anointing the forehead reminds us to ask the Holy Spirit for PEACE OF MIND. Anointing the open palms reminds us that we come to God empty-handed, UTTERLY DEPENDENT UPON HIM.

NON-SACRAMENTAL OIL

i.e. oil blessed for anyone to administer.

In his book *'In the steps of the Master'*, HV Morton describes an incident in the church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, where a pilgrim turns to address a monk: *"he raised his voice slightly and then, casting a swift glance towards the marble slab, lowered it and pointed to his forehead and to the lamps that hang over Christ's tomb. Then the monk understood. Nodding gravely, he lowered one of the lamps on a chain and taking a piece of cotton wool, he dipped it lightly in the oil of the lamp and with this made the sign of the Cross upon the peasant's face."*

Non-sacramental oil is an extension of anointing with sacramental oil. Just as holy water in a stoup reminds us of our Baptism, so oil blessed by a priest reminds us of the sacrament of anointing and extends its use day by day.

The sign of the Cross, with oil – like signing with Holy Water, is a prayer in itself. It is praying with the body.

A SUGGESTED FORM OF ANOINTING WITH NON-SACRAMENTAL OIL

"(Name) I anoint you with oil in the name of Jesus for the healing of body, mind and soul." - or:

"I anoint myself with oil in the name of Jesus for the heling of body, mind and soul."