



Opening Question:

Have you ever been seriously ill or had major surgery? What happened?

Imagine an ideal world where there's no evil, no illness, and no death. It might be ideal but, ironically, it wouldn't be perfect. Without evil, there would be no forgiveness. Without illness, there would be no healing. Without death, no hope of an afterlife with God.

But we don't live in such a world. Our's might be imperfect, but we do have forgiveness, healing and hope. Those are the reasons Christ came into the world.

Christ the Physician

Let's consider the image of Christ the Physician, the divine doctor who came to make people whole. Indeed, healing was an integral part of his ministry.

Jesus traveled all over Galilee. He taught in the synagogues, preached the Good News of God's kingdom and healed all kinds of sickness and disease among the people.

Matthew 4:23

Healing is more than the presence of divine activity. It is a foretaste of God's Kingdom. As Revelation chapter 21 states:

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death. No one will mourn or cry or be in pain. That world has disappeared!"

Revelation 21:4

Jesus gave his ministry and his vision to his followers:

Go to the lost sheep...Tell them: 'God's kingdom is near!' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and expel demons. What you received as a gift, give as a gift."

Matthew 10:6a, 7-8



Anointing of the Sick

The healing ministry Christ gave to the Church is found in a sacrament: the Anointing of the Sick. Over time, some people came to identify the sacrament with the moment of death. But over the past century, its meaning expanded to serve the seriously ill. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

The Anointing of the Sick "is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as anyone of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, (it is) the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament..."

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1514

The sacrament is meant for those who suffer from serious conditions that could lead to death and those face major surgery.

Signs of the Anointing of the Sick

There are two signs to the sacrament: the anointing with oil and the laying of hands. Both as symbols of healing. According to James, the early Church anointed people who were ill.

If you are sick, ask the presbyters to come and pray for you. Ask them to put olive oil on you in the name of the Lord. If you have faith when you pray for sick people, they will get well. The Lord will heal them, and if they have sinned, he will forgive them.

James 5:14-15

Jesus himself used touch in his ministry.

A man with leprosy came and knelt in front of Jesus. He said, "Lord, you have the power to make me well, if only you wanted to."

Jesus put his hand on the man and said, "I want to! Now you are well."

At once the man's leprosy disappeared.

Matthew 8:2-3

Effects of the Anointing of the Sick

Serious illness or old age can sap people of energy and the will to do good. In the Anointing of the Sick, they receive strength from the Spirit to fight off temptation and continue the struggles of the spiritual life. The sacrament also reminds them that they do not suffer alone. They can identify with the Passion of Christ and realize the Church walks with them even if they prepare for death. In their last moments of life, the Church can offer the dying Eucharist. This is called "viaticum" which means "provisions for the journey." This Communion, along with the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick form a pastoral act for those transitioning from this life to the next.

In an ideal world, even those who suffer injury or fall to disease would be cured. While many cures exist in our modern world, we must recognize the difference between cures and healing. Healing encompasses far more than ridding people of a condition. Healing represents spiritual and psychological growth. It means transcending past injuries and finding wholeness even from the ruins of tragedies. The Anointing of the Sick can result in a divine cure but its focus is on healing, on Christ making his people whole.

Closing Question:

How does faith in Christ make you whole?

Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs CCC 1499-1532.

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