

Original Meaning Restored to Rite

By Father Albert J. Shamon
[Second of three articles]

Last week we wrote of the three changes in the new rite of anointing. First, there was the change in name from Extreme Unction to Anointing of the Sick, from sacrament of the dying to sacrament of the sick.

Secondly, there was the change in emphasis regarding the effects of the sacrament, namely, a shift from stressing only the remission of sins to focussing on healing the obstacles to salvation caused by a serious illness.

Thirdly, there was the change from a private to a communal celebration of the sacrament.

Now let us consider a brief history of this sacrament, to discover how it came to be considered as the sacrament of the dying.

In our Lord's life, He healed the sick. His healing miracles were more than mere bodily cures, such as a veterinarian would perform for an animal. For man is more than a body, and Jesus came to save man. That is why Jesus always demanded faith before working a miracle. His bodily cures were always meant to heal man's soul, to restore health to mind and heart as well as to body. The word "salvation" itself comes from the same Latin word that means health, namely, *salus*. Consequently when our Lord sent out the apostles to preach the gospel, He gave them power to continue His healing ministry. Thus St. Mark tells us that "they anointed the sick with oil and worked many cures" (Mk. 6:13).

Later on, St. James the cousin of our Lord, wrote:

"Is there anyone sick among you?" — sick not dying.

"Let him call for the elders of the Church — not for faith healers, but for priests.

"And let them pray over him and anoint him in the name of the Church — that is, let them administer a sacrament, for sacraments are simply the prayers and actions of Christ performed through the ministry of the Church and her priests. And what will happen?

"This prayer, made in faith, will save the sick man. The Lord will restore his health — not necessarily physical health, but a healthy outlook on life and sickness and suffering. In other words, the sacrament will banish the threat of faith and trust in God which a serious sickness can pose.

From that time on, right up to the ninth century, anointing was practiced as a rite for the sick. Then during the time of Charlemagne (815 A.D.), the sacrament of anointing began to be considered as a sacrament of the dying.

Here is how that happened: in Europe, the ninth and the tenth centuries were the Dark Ages, especially for Italy. Prior to those centuries, Visigoths, Vandals, Huns, Lombards had swept into Italy, in wave after wave, pillaging, ravishing, and destroying Roman civilization, culture and order, leaving only ruin, chaos and confusion. Even

the Papacy was up for grabs. Powerful Italian families fought to put their own children on the chair of Peter. Domestic problems so engaged the Papacy at the time that little or no attention could be given to the rest of the Catholic world.

As a result, liturgical leadership shifted from Rome to the court of Charlemagne in Aachen, Germany. As always happens, when contact with Rome is cut off, distortions or errors creep into a church, no matter how Catholic it may be.

It was at this time that the anointing of the sick began to be considered a sacrament for the dying. In Charlemagne's time, there were rites for deathbed penance. The practice developed of following this penance with the anointing of the sick. Soon association led to assimilation, and anointing began to be considered the sacrament of the dying.

By the twelfth century the order had been changed from penance-anointing-vaticum to penance-vaticum-anointing. But last anointing was called "extreme unction" — the last anointing, and all three sacraments together, the last rites.

The Scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages — St. Albert, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, Duns Scotus — had no printed books, did not seek the sources of sacramental practices. Instead, they simply took the sacraments as they were administered in their days and worked from there.

They were at the time developing a theology of the sacraments as channels of grace, perfecting man. When they had a sacrament for the dying, they naturally looked chiefly for spiritual effects. Baptism, took care of original sin. Penance took care of actual sins. So Extreme Unction must take care of the remains of sin and prepare for glory. That was how we got our ideas of Extreme Unction, taught in our school days before Vatican II.

Pope Paul VI in his revision of this sacrament went back to the Scripture and to the original tradition of the Church that viewed anointing as the sacrament of the sick. Consequently, he has removed the danger of death as a condition for the reception of this sacrament — old age or serious illness suffices.

The new rite of anointing re-emphasizes that the ministry to the sick and aged must become an activity of the entire Christian community.

Isolation — to be cut off from work, from friends — can be one of the greatest afflictions of the sick. What comfort the presence of another brings to a sick person! What consolation the touch of the hand! How like Simon are those doctors, how like Veronica those nurses, and how like Christ all Christians who lovingly care for the sick and aged!

Just a visit to the sick and aged heightens their sense of self-worth and value even in trying circumstances.

[to be continued]

Store Picketed on Good Friday

A symbolic vigil in support of the United Farmworkers Union was quietly kept for 24 hours in front of Wegmans Food Market East Avenue and Winton Road, beginning at noon on Good Friday.

Members of the Farmworkers Support Committee and representatives from community and church groups manned picket lines and distributed literature urging shoppers to boycott the area's largest chain retailer. Wegmans refuses to sell only United Farm Workers lettuce and to remove non-union grapes from shelves.

The vigil that included readings and prayers of solidarity was dedicated to "the farmworkers in

this country who are involved in a non-violent struggle for justice and dignity through union representation." Efforts have been made since 1962 to organize the migrant farm workers of California who pick lettuce and grapes under the United Farmworkers banner. The growers of these products have recently signed contracts with the Teamsters union.

Few shoppers seemed deterred by the boycott although the picketers stated that an average of 60 people are turned away from the store during each session.

The support committee has been picketing Wegmans every Friday and Saturday since last December.

Quoting Dolores Huerta, vice president of the UFW, Dan O'Shea believes that "you can deal with some people on a moral and ethical level but with business people, you have to exert economic pressure."

O'Shea, a seminarian from St. Bernard's and coordinator of the support committee in Rochester, stated that the group has won one concession from Wegmans. The store has posted signs distinguishing between Teamster and United Farmworker lettuce.

Wegmans was chosen for the boycott since it is the largest local purchaser of the lettuce and grapes.

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