

Anointing of the Sick Seventh Week in Ordinary Time Saturday, March 1, 2014 8:15 AM
Jas 5:13-20; Mk 10:13-16 (If we live under God's power, we should be really living. And if we are sick, we should at least be sick without a sense of fear.)

“Is there anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

We are continuing to reflect on the Letter of St. James, which is a beautiful letter about wisdom, about how to live a wise life, how to live a holy life, how to live a blessed life.

Here he is dealing with the issue that we all face sooner or later of illness. He is not talking here about having a cold or sniffles or something minor; **he is talking about being sick.** He says, “Let him”—the sick one that means, him or her, “let him or her summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.” The point is, **Who is supposed to be calling? The sick person.** A sick person can use other people as messengers, but the request is to come from the one who is sick. Too often, in my long life as a priest, I have been summoned to a sick person who did not ask for me, but the family did. Someone in the family concerned called for me. This happens all the time. It's better than nothing, true, but the sick person should have been the one to call. And the sick person **should call early on, not at the last minute.** This is about healing. **It's about God's power to heal.** And you see throughout the New Testament that God heals **people who believe in him, who trust in him.**

Now sooner or later we all die, yes, of course. This is not about death however. This is about life, and this is about **believing in the healing power of God exercised through the ministry of the Church.** So it's very sad when you have people who are months suffering from cancer and then in their last hours somebody in the family calls for the priest. That is not what James is talking about. What James is talking about is when someone is afflicted with cancer or any

serious illness, that that person request a priest to come, and pray with faith that healing can take place. And it cannot always take place because, as I say, we are all mortal; **sooner or later we will pass**. But of course **that itself can be a final healing**. But the point is this is not something to be put off to the last possible minute, and it's quite sad when that happens.

Now there are times when actually something just creeps up, where there is an **unannounced illness**. Well, **that happens**. Also **there are accidents** when people all of a sudden are in a car crash or something else. But ordinarily what this is about is calling a priest early on, receiving the graces to deal with sickness.

My mother had cancer of the breast and she wanted to be anointed. She of course was afraid, as people ordinarily are. She said the minute she was anointed all her fear let her. Subsequently, through various chemotherapies and prayer, she was freed from that particular episode. Later on she got cancer somewhere else. Again prayer and therapy together freed her from that. But then she died of something else. So we all die; that's all part of life. But the point is we live for God and if we live for God, we live under God's power. **If we live under God's power, we should be really living**. **And if we are sick, we should at least be sick without a sense of fear**. A fear of dying, a fear of death, a fear of God—that's not part of faith. And if it is not possible to be joyful, at least we can be peaceful and avoid bitterness.