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## SACRAMENTS FOR THE SICK : A WONDERFUL PRAYER

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As we near February 11, the World Day of the Sick, I want to talk to you about the sacrament of the sick, look at its positive aspects as well as its importance for both the sick and the Church.

### ANXIETY OR HOPE

More than twenty years ago, at the time when man was preparing to set foot on the moon, I had the opportunity - the grace, I should say - to replace for a short while the chaplain at St-Jean-Eudes Hospital in Havre Saint-Pierre on Québec's North Shore. Although the Vatican Council II Constitution on the Divine Liturgy was approved December 4, 1963, the new guidelines regarding the sacrament of the sick were not too well known or even welcomed. Besides, those paragraphs of the conciliar document which pertain to the sacrament of the sick were not to be implemented before 1972 with the publication of the new Ritual for the sacraments of the sick. But every time someone was sick I talked about the possibility for them of receiving the sacrament of the sick.

### WAS EDMOND DEAD?

Mr. Edmond had just had a coronary infarct, and I offered him the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. There were over 40 people surrounding the patient. At the time, receiving the sacrament of the sick was tantamount to a death sentence, to the patient and his family. It goes without saying that celebrating a sacrament at such a time carries with it moments of intense emotional reactions. In the midst of all the tears being shed I tried to talk about the hope which Jesus brings and which is signified by this sacrament. The following morning I returned to the hospital to get some news of the patient, but he was no longer there! "Is Mr. Edmond dead?" I asked with apprehension. "No," was the answer, "He has been transferred to the room kept for the dying. He is doing much better, but he asked to be taken to that room because there is a better view of the sea..."

### HAPPINESS PROMISED

How good it is to give thanks to Jesus Christ for the hope he has deposited in us through his passion, death, and resurrection. How beneficial it is to still celebrate his marvels through Holy Anointing. Like Edmond, you will laugh at life that never ceases to surprise us, and enjoy the singing waters of the sea. If Edmond was not able to watch man's first moonwalk, the Lord had made his presence felt in his life, despite time and distance. Floods of living water had poured out to him, through Jesus. The general introduction to the Ritual of the Sacraments for the Sick asserts: *"Meetings of Christians with their sick brothers and sisters shall be occasions of dialogue and friendship, as well as of sharing. These meetings will favour openness to others, and help them pursue their personal Christian vocation in their new situation."* And Pope John Paul II comments: *"The renewal of pastoral cation finds its most significant expression in the sacramental celebration with and for the sick as strength in pain and in weakness, as hope in despair, and as place of meeting and celebration."*

## A SACRAMENT TO BE REVALUED

Father Paul Tremblay of Chicoutimi states: *"Despite much talk about renewal we must acknowledge that the anointing of the sick still remains unknown and misunderstood for the most part, given short shrift, and generally put off until the very last moment of life, a sacrament whose only role is to herald the imminent drama of death. It is a sacrament that is death's companion and like death it wends its way through the family's tears and seeks a place in operating and emergency rooms. The implementation of the 1972 Ritual has hardly started."* And he adds: *"The education asked for and required by the new Ritual for the sacraments of the sick still waits to be done. Let's not fool ourselves: apart from certain community celebrations of anointing in a few seniors' homes and community centres, apart also from the frequent reminder that one must no longer say 'extreme unction' but 'sacrament of the sick,' the usual practice of our Church remains a terminal one, a practice of extreme unction."*

## SEVERAL SACRAMENTS OF THE SICK

I am happy to note that in our diocesan Church of Edmundston several heads of parishes have already carefully prepared the celebration of the sacraments of the sick, and have taken the time to explain things to the faithful. I have just written "celebration of sacraments of the sick." *"It is the main idea of the Ritual,"* says Father Tremblay, *"and it is indicated in its very title, 'Sacraments for the Sick.' Note the plural: not the sacrament of the sick, but sacraments for the sick. As a matter of fact, there are several sacraments for the sick. There is communion to the sick, the anointing of the sick, reconciliation of the sick and, finally, viaticum. A whole sacramental group, offering many options corresponding to the different situations of sick Christians."*

## ANOINTING OF THE SICK

*This is not a sacrament for terminally ill patients or for those in imminent danger of death. It is a sacrament for those seriously afflicted by sickness or old age. We say 'seriously afflicted,' that is, deeply troubled and dangerously beset by illness. It is a sacrament for the sick when suffering is so overwhelming that it could quench their sense of hope."*

Next week I shall continue to share with you how the sacraments for the sick are such a wonderful power.

*+ François Thibodeau*

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