

On Death XII

The sacraments bring Jesus to the deathbed to provide forgiveness by God's grace.

A great part of any life is the “end game...” or how we depart. Hospice is designed to make the end a consummation of the person's life, not just the last days. To be able to face eternity with work completed, and preparations made is a blessing for all. Hospice isn't for everyone, but the need for resolution at the end is universal. For Catholics the “last sacraments” are often also a way of finding permission to leave. I mentioned permission to leave last week in connection with my Mom; she was not a religious person, and although I gave her the last sacraments, it was the exchange between us that gave her permission. For many Catholics, however “last rites” form that permission. There are two last sacraments: anointing of the sick, which we used to call “extreme unction” [given at death only] and Viaticum which means “food for the journey” or last Holy Communion. Often people are unable to swallow at the end, so Holy Communion is out, but anointing of the sick can smooth the way for a person to leave. We also give what is called the “Apostolic pardon” which is given near death, although most people are not able to confess toward the last days, but a recognition that our forgiveness comes from God's grace and not our ability to recollect our sins. Often when we are called to the deathbed, the person derives permission to depart and they go rapidly, sometimes while I am still in the room, but most often within a short time of hours. The sacraments bring Jesus to the deathbed, and can be a source of peace for the family.

IHM Pray for us.

Fr. Jerry