

On Death XIII

The call for the Priest should be timely enough to be meaningful to the loved one.

I wrote about Anointing of the Sick last week, and would like to say a little more about that. The passage in Scripture from the 5th chapter of the Letter of James says that when one is sick he or she should call for the Presbyters [priests] of the Church who would anoint them with oil for the forgiveness of sins, for salvation, and so that the Lord can raise them up. Jesus himself anointed people with oil, and it became a common practice in the Church after Pentecost. It is essentially a healing prayer, but for centuries it was relegated to the deathbed when no healing was expected. After the 2nd Vatican Council the Church restored the ancient rite to its rightful place. As such it is entirely appropriate for any sick person to ask for anointing; before surgery or any other medical procedure, and even for routine illness it is not unheard of for people to be anointed. Over time I have learned that people with difficult diagnoses such as cancer, can be anointed on a monthly basis, and it seems to help them to endure the treatments and to raise the hope of eventual healing. As it often happens when death approaches the person is too sick to receive Holy Communion, which is the true last sacrament, so we anoint. However a word of caution, families should not wait until their loved one is taking their last breath to call for a priest; because we are busy with so many things it makes sense to call BEFORE the end. Better to be prepared than to worry that someone didn't get the sacrament before they died. After a person dies we do not anoint them. Sacraments are for the living.

IHM Pray for us.

Fr. Jerry