

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

You mean the “The Last Rites,” don’t you?

No, I don’t. In fact, we have no liturgical ritual entitled “Last Rites.” Prior to the early 1970’s, we used that phrase and called this sacrament *extreme unction* (meaning *final anointing*). This conjured up images of a person in their last gasping breaths being hovered over by a priest chanting prayers in Latin that no one understood, with candles lit, and a very dramatic scene. It was so frightening, many people refused the sacrament. Even today, people refuse the sacrament fearing it means death is imminent.

So who can be anointed?

Anyone of any age who is gravely ill, about to undergo surgery, dealing with chronic pain, living with a serious disease (such as HIV, Cancer, etc.).

When should we ask for anointing?

Please don’t wait. When someone is about to go into the hospital and you wish this sacrament, ask us. We are happy to anoint you after a Sunday or weekday Mass. If you cannot get out, we will come to you. If your loved one goes into hospice care, call us right away.

But we were taught you had to wait until the very end was near!

We want to be able to pray with you or your loved one. We want you to be a part of this sacrament. Often, if death is near, we will hear confession, anoint, and administer Holy Communion. We call this *Viaticum* or food for the journey to eternal life. If someone is unconscious, we cannot do this.

We called and asked our aunt to be anointed. She died before the priest could get there and we were very angry. Now she’ll go to hell.

First, we’re sorry we couldn’t get there. As the number of available priests grows less each and every year, it is not always easy for us to get to an anointing request. But please be assured, your loved one is not condemned to hell for not being anointed.

If the priests don’t use the phrase *Last Rites*, why do I keep hearing about them on television?

Newscasters and screen writers use the phrase because it sounds more dramatic than *the Anointing of the Sick*.

Will you anoint my dad after he’s died?

The Church teaches that sacraments are for the living. If you wish and we are available, we will come and pray with you in the presence of your loved one’s body.

My family members don’t come to Church anymore. Can they still be anointed?

We are happy to make a visit, offer the Sacrament of Penance and anoint your loved one.

My dad was anointed last year when he was in the hospital. But he still has to be anointed before he dies, right?

He can be anointed again, but there is no expiration on God’s grace. The grace received in anointing is eternal. The anointing near death is exactly the same anointing as he received before.