

Death Be Not Proud: The Art of Dying in the Catholic Tradition

Part III: The Last Rites

Tuesday, July 23 | 6:45pm

St. Vincent Ferrer, 869 Lexington Avenue, Lower Church

- I. July 9: Faith, Hope, and a Happy Death
- II. July 16: The Art of Dying
- III. July 23: The Last Rites**
- IV. July 30: Eternal Life

Scripture Passages

- “*Is 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, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven*” (James 5:14-15).
- “[*The Twelve*] *anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them*” (Mark 6:13).

Introduction and Housekeeping

- In this series, we now focus on the *sacramental* resources that the Church offers to strengthen and console the dying. The three sacraments given at the end of life are Penance, Anointing of the Sick, and the Eucharist received as Viaticum.

General Outline and Roadmap

1. The Sacraments in General
2. Anointing of the Sick
3. Penance at the End of Life
4. The Eucharist as Viaticum

I. The Sacraments in General

- The seven sacraments are signs, instituted by Jesus Christ, that cause grace by signifying.
 - The question of valid or invalid: *Did the sign happen or not?*
 - Each sacramental sign includes several parts:
 - The matter (e.g., water washing)
 - The form (e.g., “N., I baptize you, etc.”)
 - The minister
 - The intention of the minister
- Sacraments have their effects by the power of God.
 - *Ex opere operato* vs. *ex opere operantis*
- Different sacraments have different effects.
- We must be well-disposed to receive, or to receive fully, the benefits of the sacraments.

II. The Anointing of the Sick

- The anointing of the sick gives the grace to suffer and die well by sanctifying our suffering and removing obstacles that stand in the way of our entry into heaven.
- Who can receive this sacrament? All of the following conditions must be true:
 - The person is alive, not dead.

- The person is baptized.
- The person is suffering from present serious physical illness or frailty (some danger of death).
- The person is over the age of reason (~7 years old).
 - This person has had the ability to commit personal sins.
- Ordinarily, the person must be spiritually alive (“in a state of grace”).
- The Exterior Rite
 - Matter: A series of anointings with blessed Oil of the Sick
 - Form: “*Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. . . . May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.*”
- The Effects
 - Effect #1 – The sanctified state of sickness or frailty
 - Effect #2 – The grace of healing the weakness caused by sin
 - Side-effect #1 – Possible absolution of sins
 - Side-effect #2 – Possible physical healing for spiritual good

III. Penance at the End of Life

- The sacrament of Penance and the virtue of penance
- Our role in the rite of penance
 - The penitent provides contrition, confession, and satisfaction (the “matter”).
 - The priest-confessor provides absolution (the “form”).
- Particular considerations for the end of life
 - What happens if the sick person can’t speak, hear, or remember?
- The Sacrament of Penance, when celebrated for the dying, should be followed by the indulgence known as the Apostolic Pardon.

IV. The Eucharist as Viaticum

- “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world*” (John 6:51).
- “*May the Lord Jesus Christ protect you and lead you to eternal life*” (Rite of Viaticum).

Conclusion

- The Eucharist is *the pledge of future glory*, but there will be no sacraments in heaven.
- Instead, we will see God face to face.

Further Resources:

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1499–1532
- Aquinas 101 video series (aquinas101.thomisticinstitute.org)
- Colman O’Neill, O.P., *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments* (1964)
- Roger Nutt, *To Die is Gain: A Theological (re-)Introduction to the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick* (2022)