

THE SACRAMENT OF

extreme unction



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EXTREME UNCTION

Sacrament of the Dying

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The man's relatives were astounded by my suggestion that I give him the sacrament of Extreme Unction. They knew he was dying—but death was still far off. Just before I walked into his hospital room they had been talking about baseball. The doctor had told them that he still had two months to live.

Why anoint him now? But if I thought it would be better, okay! I talked for a few minutes with the sick man and prepared him to receive the sacrament the following day.

The next morning I heard his confession, brought him Holy Communion and began the anointing. "By this holy anointing, and of His most tender mercy, may the Lord forgive you whatever offenses you have committed through the sense of sight . . . through the sense of hearing . . . smelling. . . ." And so on for sins committed by the lips, the hands and the feet. After the anointing I left.

About half an hour later I returned to the sick man's room, and we talked about Extreme Unction; for he was dying. But also about baseball, for he had two months left to live and the World Series would be over by then. He was still interested in this world, but preparing for the next.

I could understand why he and his

family were taken somewhat aback by my suggestion not to delay Extreme Unction. Every Catholic with even the slightest bit of knowledge about the Church knows that Christ left seven separate sacraments for those who follow Him, each for a different need in the life of the Church. But among the seven, perhaps the least understood is the sacrament of Extreme Unction.

Is It "The Kiss of Death"?

Is it, as many think, meant to be the kiss of death? Given only when the Christian has reached his final hours? Every priest with even a little experience has met many Catholics who think so. At the first suggestion that a sick person be given this sacrament their faces blanch. If he's that bad he will certainly die. Would it be wise to anoint him now? Wouldn't it discourage him and take away all his will to live?

There is some reason for this confusion on the part of ordinary Catholics. The Church has officially defined comparatively little about this sacrament, only the essentials. And preachers explain its purpose in the Christian life in various ways.

In the Council of Trent, held in the 16th century, the Church made clear the basic doctrinal points about the sacrament

of Extreme Unction. In brief, this is what Catholics are obliged to believe about this sacrament.

Four Doctrinal Teachings

First, Extreme Unction is definitely a true sacrament, instituted by Christ and handed down to us by the Apostle James in the fifth chapter of his Epistle.

“Is one of you sick? Let him send for the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Lord’s name. Prayer offered in faith will restore the sick man, and the Lord will give him relief; if he is guilty of sins, they will be pardoned . . .” (James 5:14-15).

It is, then, more than just a practice coming down from the Fathers and adopted by the Church.

Also, the Church has defined that as a sacrament Extreme Unction does give grace, remit sin and relieve the sick person. And, the Council of Trent insisted, the rites followed by the Church in this sacrament are in substantial accord with the words of St. James in his Epistle.

The final doctrinal point defined by the Church refers to the actual text of St. James’ Epistle. In it, he tells Christians that if they are sick they should call in the presbyters (*seniores*) of the Church,

who will pray over them and anoint them with oil. These *seniores*, the Church declares, are not elders or leaders of the people in any civic sense, but are and must be ordained priests or Bishops. With these four points the doctrinal teaching of the Church about this sacrament is complete. From here on we must rely on tradition and the teaching of theologians for a further understanding of this sacrament.

Why We Are Confused

While all Catholics agree on the basic points defined by the Church, some theologians and preachers stress one aspect of the sacrament of Extreme Unction when they explain it, while others stress a different aspect. For this reason lay Catholics are often confused.

First of all, is the sacrament of Extreme Unction meant primarily to restore bodily health to the sick? At first glance, we might be led to think this from the text of the Epistle of St. James: "Prayer offered in faith will restore the sick man, and the Lord will give him relief"

We know that Christ came among us to rescue us from the results of original sin and of our personal sins. Certainly, sickness and death are the results of sin and really are evil in themselves. We know that if Adam and Eve had not sinned,

neither sickness nor death would have been part of man's lot on this earth. We also know that Christ during his lifetime on earth was very much concerned with the sick. As we read the Gospels, we notice that a far greater number of the miracles therein described have to do with cures of the body than with moral conversion. And when Christ wanted to illustrate the meaning of charity, He did so by telling us the story of the good Samaritan — the story whose hero cared for the wounded body of a stranger until he had recovered from the beating the robbers had given him.

We also know that in the early days of the Church miracles of bodily health were not at all unusual. In chapter three of the Acts of the Apostles we read the story of how Peter and John cured the lame beggar at the gate of the Temple. In chapter five we read that the Jews used to put their sick into the streets, so that when Peter passed, his shadow at least might fall on some of them. "And they were all cured." In chapter eight of the Acts of the Apostles, we read the story of Philip's evangelization of Samaria. "And the crowds with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, listening to him and seeing the miracles that he worked. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, went out of many pos-

sessed persons, *and many paralytics and cripples were cured.* So there was great joy in that city."

The Primary Intention

But does all this mean that we should understand Extreme Unction as being primarily intended for the health of the body? I do not think so.

"Prayer offered in faith will restore the sick man, and the Lord will give him relief." In this epistle of St. James, the word "restore," as I have translated it, or "save" as it can also be translated, is used four other times. In these other four times, St. James always uses it clearly in the sense of spiritual salvation rather than bodily health. Very probably, he also intends this word to have the same meaning here.

There is within man a natural yearning for immortality, not only of the soul but also of the body. But the body is plagued by the necessity of dying, a necessity brought on by original sin. The only immortality possible for the body comes to it through Christ, through the fullness of redemption which He promises to bring to all of us on the Last Day when our bodies and souls will be reunited and the body will rise again. The sacrament of Extreme Unction, with its anointing of the body,

certainly promises this. However, the full explanation of the meaning of the sacrament of Extreme Unction is more than just a question of bodily health.

But does this mean that the sacrament of Extreme Unction never has the effect of curing the sick body? No, by no means! The Council of Trent, in speaking of Extreme Unction, said explicitly: "Also, the bodily health is sometimes restored when this is helpful for the well-being of the person's soul." And though the word "restore" as used by St. James in this Epistle seems to refer to spiritual salvation primarily, in some other parts of Scripture it does refer to bodily health and it is the opinion of many scholars that it also has this meaning in the text about Extreme Unction, though in a secondary sense. And finally, it is a fact of experience to which many priests, doctors and nurses will testify that the sacrament sometimes does cause physical betterment to the person who receives it.

One Particular Need

Our point is that the main purpose of the sacrament is not to give physical health once more to the sick person. Indeed, if this were its main purpose, Christians would never have to die. All they

would have to do is to keep a priest handy so that they could be anointed each time they seemed to be in danger of death from sickness and they would live forever. Just what, then, is the meaning of this sacrament in the Christian life?

Some, perhaps, will quarrel with the explanation that I give here. They are within their rights. But I hope that this pamphlet will clear up many misunderstandings about Extreme Unction and also show why we should really want to receive it and have our loved ones receive it when they are dying.

St. Thomas Aquinas remarked in his writings on the sacraments that each one fulfills a particular need in the supernatural life of the Christian. And I think that the clearest way to understand the place of Extreme Unction in our life is to see just what need a dying man has that a sacrament can fulfill. Of course, he needs the sacrament of Penance if he is in the state of mortal sin. And he needs the Eucharist, but this is a constant need all through life for the Christian. If we can find a need that he has only while he is dying and at no other time, one that a sacrament can satisfy, I think we will understand just why Christ instituted Extreme Unction

and how we can best make use of it when our turn to die comes.

What Is Death?

Why does a man die (not when it's accidental, such as by being shot or hit by a train, but when it's a natural death)? Natural death comes when the body is no longer able to cope with its surroundings.

For nine months before birth an infant is carried within the protecting embrace of its mother's womb. During this time it grows until it finally becomes able to adapt to external conditions. Then, after birth, this adaptability increases for some years until a man reaches the prime of his life. After this, it gradually decreases. Finally, either through disease or old age, the body is so weakened that it loses all power to adapt to conditions of life in the world.

When the body can no longer serve the soul in the wonderful way intended by God when He fused them together to form a human being, the soul separates from the body, which then dies.

Naturally, this disintegration taking place in the body affects it greatly. And that strain has its effect also on the mind and other powers of the soul.

Man is made of body and soul; but the

two are very much one, and each has far-reaching effects on the other. For example, have you ever tried to listen to beautiful music or enjoy a visit to an art gallery when you had a nagging headache? You can't concentrate on the beauty of either the music or the art because of your headache.

In the same way it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, to work an intricate math problem or examine your conscience if you're bothered even by such a little thing as a toothache. These few examples should show just how much the body can influence the power of the mind to concentrate. And they are not much compared to the stress on the body in its struggles prior to death.

The Specter of Fear

The effect of this pain is to make the dying person sluggish and listless. The pain so preoccupies him that he can't really concentrate on anything else. But a dying man should concentrate on his imminent meeting with his Judge and Redeemer.

The physical pain of the body, however, is only one of the things that assails the person struggling against the press of death. He has also to fight the specter of fear.

As Shakespeare wrote in *Measure for Measure*:

“The weariest and most loathed
worldly life

That age, ache, penury and im-
prisonment

Can lay on nature, is a paradise

To what we fear of death. . . .”

No one wants to die. At least, this is true of most of us. We're afraid to; we don't know what death is, what lies beyond it. Death is beyond any doubt “the Great Unknown.” No matter how painful, frustrating, boring and tedious our life at times becomes, we at least know it. We're acquainted with it and have reached a kind of truce with it. We expect its blows; we know that at times it also has its joys. We simply don't know anything about death or about what happens afterward.

Faith Fights Fear

Sure, by faith we can say a lot about life after death. We have learned and believe that there will be an immediate judgment—and then either heaven, hell or purgatory. And with faith we read the wonderful description of the Beatific Vision that St. John paints for us in the Apocalypse: “Here is God's tabernacle pitched among men; He will dwell with them, and they will be His own people, and He will

be among them, their own God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, or mourning, or cries of distress, no more sorrow; those old things have passed away" (Apoc. 21: 3-4).

Such is the beautiful Christian hope of life after death, but the point is that it is a *hope*. Faith tells us much about life after death; but what we can't forget is that this is only a vision of faith, not knowledge. While faith is a wonderful thing, it's sometimes hard. And when we come face to face with death, it's not easy to graciously exchange the life that we know so well here below for the vision of after-life provided us by our Christian belief. Try as we will, we still have to wrestle with our very real and natural fear of the unknown.

This fear, mostly emotional, has an effect on the mind very similar to that which the physical strain of dying places on the body. Surrounded by the terrors of the unknown, the soul in a very real sense stands frozen in fear. Fear of death paralyzes the soul's faculties. The dying man becomes, in a sense, numb mentally, overcome by torpor and listlessness.

Now when this fear assails the mind and pain racks the body, it becomes most difficult for a man to really prepare for oncoming death in a proper way. And for

the Christian, this is a tragedy, for death should be the climax of his life.

Death Is Life's Climax

But what do we mean by saying that death should be the climax of the Christian life?

The baptized person very simply does not have only his natural life, but now lives a supernatural life also. It is the life that Christ came on earth to give us. It is what He meant when He said that He had come that we "might have life and have it more abundantly." It is the life He referred to when He called Himself "the Way, the Truth and the Life." At Baptism, we become sharers in Christ's own life. That is why He told the Jews, "Whatever you do to one of these, the least of My brethren, you do to Me." Why He could ask one of the first persecutors of the Church, "Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute Me?" Why Paul could later say, "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." The supernatural life that we receive in Baptism is the life of Christ Himself to Whom we are joined through grace.

And since we have received this life, everything that we do should make that life within us grow. In fact, it is the ideal and fullness of sanctity to reach an ever greater identification with Christ.

If we can speak from a human point of view, Christ's finest hour was the hour of His death. It was there on Calvary that He fulfilled the sacrifice which He had come on earth to perform. So if we are to arrive at a complete imitation of Christ it can only be in the moment of our death.

Christ on Calvary is our perfect model of complete abandonment of self to the love of God. Since the Crucifixion was His Father's will for Him, He gladly and graciously went along with that will. With complete trust in His Father's love, Christ shed every vestige of self-protection and gave Himself entirely into His Father's hands. And this, too, the dying Christian must try to do.

Pain and Fear Numb Mind

Our life here below is necessarily one of faith and trust in God. Perhaps this was the lesson Christ most insisted on during His years of preaching on earth. And if we pass a whole life of believing in God and trusting in His love for us, why shouldn't we pass from life with those same sentiments? Neither clinging to life nor eager for death, but just willing to accept graciously from the hands of God whatever He chooses to send us, whether it be pain or pleasure, life or death?

Such a degree of faith is not easy, even when we are in the best of health. But when our body is tortured with the struggles of dying and our mind is preoccupied with this pain and with the fear of looming death, it becomes even harder to have this faith. Both the physical pain and the psychological fear combine to numb the mind. In this stupor, we lie on our bed of death assailed by lethargy and apathy. The faculties of our mind and will are blunted and deadened by the physical pain and the obsessive dread of approaching death — and this at a time when we should be most alive with faith and hope.

But once we understand the effects of physical pain and psychological fear on the mind of the dying person, we can see much more clearly the meaning of the sacrament of Extreme Unction in God's plans. For these are the specific needs that the sacrament is intended to meet.

How Extreme Unction Helps

First, how does the sacrament affect the body? As we have seen above, when death approaches, the physical torture it brings to the body can't help but affect the mind and will of the dying person. It so pre-occupies him that he is not free to make the acts of faith, hope and love that he

should be making. The body very definitely becomes a hindrance to the actions of the soul under these conditions.

Now the effect of the sacrament of Extreme Unction on the body changes all this. It brings relief for the body so that no longer is it a hindrance to the soul in the great act of faith a man makes in accepting death. Perhaps the pain remains; almost always it does to some degree. But there also comes a quietness, a rest for the body. No longer does it occupy center stage in the mind. The mind is once more free to concentrate on working hard to identify itself with the dying Christ.

But this isn't the full story of the effect of the sacrament by any means. It also works directly on the soul to dispel the effects which the fear of death has on the dying man's mind and will. The Council of Trent describes these effects in the following words: "The effect of this sacrament is the grace of the Holy Spirit which wipes away any sins which still are to be expiated as well as the remains of sin.

"Further, it lifts up and strengthens the soul of the sick one by arousing in him a great trust in the divine mercy. The sick person, thus aided, more easily bears the struggles and pains of his illness and more easily resists the temptations of the devil.

Also, the bodily health is sometimes restored when this is helpful for the well-being of the person's soul."

A Little-Known Effect

Another effect of the sacrament of Extreme Unction is not mentioned by the Council of Trent but sometimes described by theologians. Happiness in heaven is meant for the whole person, not merely for the soul. The body, too, must share in it after the final judgment at the end of the world when body and soul are once more reunited for all eternity. Generally, theologians describing the Beatific Vision do so in terms of the soul, but immediately add that the happiness and glorification of the soul overflow and also affect the body. The body, too, becomes glorified.

Now the sacrament of Extreme Unction, applied to the body as it is, adds something to the glory of the body in heaven. There is some special degree of glory for the body of each one who was fortunate enough to receive the sacrament of Extreme Unction at the end of his days on earth. This special glory is spoken of by theologians as a certain *fulgor* or brilliance over and above what the body would have otherwise.

Once someone realizes just what ef-

fects this sacrament has on both the body and soul of the dying person, it is only natural for him to want to receive it himself at the proper time.

Death Is Never Easy

Death is not easy, not even for the fervent Christian soul. But death is something every man owes to God, the final payment he can make in retribution for the sins he has committed as well as for the original sin which taints us all. If there is anything that will make that act of dying easier, we should want it. And there is that "something" — the sacrament which Christ left to His followers to make death not easy, but at least easier than otherwise, the sacrament of Extreme Unction.

When a person is dying, whether death is moments away or months away, he is very close to the dying Christ of Calvary. He is given the opportunity of imitating Christ to the last breath of life just as Christ gave Himself for us to the last drop of His blood. The approach of death, then, puts man in a very holy state. But he must be able to live that state in the fullness of his faculties. Otherwise, it might lead him to remorse, discouragement and, finally, to despair. And it is the sacrament of Extreme Unction that makes

it possible for the body—even when weakened by sickness—to be a fitting instrument for the soul for the final scene of its earthly drama.

Also, in its effects directly on the soul Extreme Unction makes death easier by erasing the apprehensive fears of approaching death. It calms the soul by exciting in it a tremendous faith and hope in the mercy of the God Who will surely judge us but Who just as surely loves us.

Sacrament of the Dying

It's obvious, then, why we should want to receive this sacrament. As the end of life draws nearer, the devil gets busier. Frantically realizing that the time left him to snatch a soul from the bosom of God's love is coming to an end, he hurls himself at the dying man in all his fury. And the dying man who has received the sacrament of Extreme Unction is much safer from his attacks.

No, Extreme Unction is not the kiss of death. A countless number of Catholics have received it and have regained their health. Nor, on the other hand, is it a medicine or a substitute for medicine. Sometimes, it does help one recover his health; but this effect is not the direct purpose of the sacrament. Extreme Unction is the sacrament of the dying—a

legacy left by Christ to make it easier for Christians to die more united to Him in the moment of His own death.

But since its purpose is to help the Christian soul prepare for death, it should not be withheld until the actual death struggle has begun. By then it is often too late for Extreme Unction to have its *full* effect. When one has sunk into unconsciousness, it is too late to make fervent acts of faith, hope and love, to offer one's sufferings in union with the suffering of the crucified Christ, to graciously and trustingly accept from God's hands anything He wishes to send us, whether it be life or death.

What About Sudden Death?

Up to this point we have been talking about a normal death . . . a death that is clearly foreseen and so can be prepared for. But what about the man whom death snatches suddenly and without a hint? The hunter shot down accidentally? The family wiped out in a holiday auto collision? The swimmer seized by sudden cramps who drowns? Or the poor man who slips into predeath coma without benefit of the sacrament of Extreme Unction because tenderhearted relatives were not willing to tell him he was dying? Can

Extreme Unction help those who die in this way?

Yes! And the Church insists that even when one has been pronounced medically dead he should still be given this sacrament. For some time after apparent death the body is yet warm with the glow of life and no one, neither doctor nor priest, can say at what precise instant the soul leaves the body. For this reason a priest will anoint the body of one who has apparently been dead for several hours in the hope that a flicker of life yet remains and that the soul has not yet left the body.

Throughout this pamphlet we have been speaking about how this sacrament helps a man to die a Christian death. But there is another point, perhaps even more important, that we have not yet treated. In the Council of Trent the Church teaches us that the grace of this sacrament "wipes away any sins which still are to be expiated as well as the remains of sin."

Can We Bypass Purgatory?

Many a man has been struck by death without having a chance to confess the sins he has on his soul. But if throughout his life he has always had the wish to die a Christian death and has had the proper sorrow for his sins, Extreme Unction will win him forgiveness for the sins he didn't

have the chance to confess. Furthermore, it will do away with the temporal punishment due him for these sins and even for those sins he had confessed in his past life (always presuming, of course, that his dispositions are proper, and only to the extent that they are proper). The sacrament of Extreme Unction has this effect as long as the body and soul are still united, even though *apparent* death had occurred two or three hours previously.

As long as there is even the slightest chance that the soul will be helped by Extreme Unction, the priest will give it, at least conditionally. And every Catholic should feel obligated to call a priest to anoint a dying person, even if death has apparently claimed the victory.

The fact that Extreme Unction "wipes away any sins which are still to be expiated as well as the remains of sin" is a very important point to a proper appreciation of this sacrament.

Most of us are reconciled to spending some time in purgatory. In fact it's probably more accurate to say that getting into purgatory is the limit of our expectations and our ambitions. But it's possible to bypass purgatory on our way to heaven. And Extreme Unction can help us do this.

All theologians, no matter on what facet

of the sacrament they focus their explanation of it, agree that God's purpose in instituting this sacrament was to enable the sick person, if he dies, to enter heaven without delay. It can take away all the temporal punishment due us for the sins we have committed during our lifetime. And for the person who receives it with perfect love of God and a complete sorrow for his sins, it will do so. To the extent that our love of God is imperfect and our contrition lacking, the temporal punishment will remain and it will be necessary for us to be purged by the fires of purgatory.

Who Can Give It?

Before we end this pamphlet on the sacrament of Extreme Unction, perhaps we should take some time to consider a few practical points about it. First of all, who can receive this sacrament? Or, on the other hand, who can administer Extreme Unction?

Only a priest can administer it, but any priest can do so. Ordinarily the chaplain of the hospital or your parish priest should be summoned to give Extreme Unction, but in an emergency any priest can be called on to do it. It doesn't matter whether or not he's a stranger, or of an Oriental rite, or even an apostate. The

fact of his priestly ordination gives him the power to confer this sacrament, and, when necessary, you have the right to ask it of him.

Baptism is the first requirement necessary for one to receive this sacrament. This is the first of Christ's sacraments and is an indispensable prerequisite for the reception of any of the other sacraments. Further, the recipient of Extreme Unction must be someone who has achieved the use of reason. Infants and the insane who never at any time in their lives had the use of reason cannot receive this sacrament validly.

The purpose of Extreme Unction is to help the dying Christian end his life devoutly. But it presupposes that the one who receives it has the use of reason and can make use of the grace of the sacrament. An infant, lacking the use of reason, cannot co-operate with this grace. Also, neither a baptized person under the age of reason nor one who has never had the use of reason can have either sin or the remains of sin on his soul. Hence, they have no need for this sacrament.

Who Can Receive It?

Another point: Not anyone who is in danger of death can receive this sacrament, but only those who are in danger

of death by reason of some bodily illness. St. James, in describing this sacrament in his Epistle, speaks very explicitly on this point: He doesn't say, "Is any one of you in danger of death," but "Is one of you sick?" I think that the reason for this is clear from our explanation of this sacrament. It is an understatement to say that one about to be executed or one about to go into battle is in danger of death. However, this danger is external and doesn't arise from within him. He does not undergo the pain and agony of the disintegrating process brought on by a sickened body. On the other hand, he might well have to face up to the psychological fear of approaching death. However, he has at hand the resources of confession, prayer and Holy Eucharist. These ordinary means should allow him to overcome the soul's anxiety in the face of death. Thus, he doesn't really have the specific needs for which Christ instituted the sacrament of Extreme Unction.

How to Prepare for Priest

And now for one last practical point: How to prepare your home for the priest who is coming to anoint one of your dying loved ones. But first of all, let me repeat what I stated earlier. Do not wait until the last moment to call the priest.

The sick person may die before he arrives or perhaps may lapse into unconsciousness and so be unable to benefit fully from this sacrament. But even if the person is already unconscious, or has not been practicing his Faith for some time, or even when death apparently already has taken place within the previous two hours, the priest should be called.

Under ordinary circumstances, the priest will not only administer the sacrament of Extreme Unction; he will also hear the confession of the dying person and bring him Holy Viaticum. Therefore, when the priest is called, he should be given accurate information about the ill person. In particular, tell him whether the person is conscious and can swallow and retain the Host in Holy Communion. Then he will be able to judge whether or not he should bring Viaticum to the sick person. When the priest arrives at the home of the sick person, he should be met at the door by someone carrying a lighted, blessed candle and led to the sickroom. In the sickroom, near the bed, there should be a table covered with a white cloth. On it there should be a crucifix, two lighted candles, a glass containing some water, a spoon, a few small pieces of bread and a white cloth. The crucifix, tablecloth and candles are to honor Christ present in the Blessed

Sacrament. After giving Communion to the sick person, the priest must wash his fingers, just as he does after the Communion at Mass. He does this by putting a little water in the spoon, washing his fingers in it, and then giving the water to the sick person to drink just in case there are any small fragments of the Host in the water. The small pieces of bread are necessary for the priest to clean off his fingers after he has used the Holy Oils in anointing the sick person.

If the sick person is conscious, the priest will hear his confession first of all. During this time, everyone else should leave the room. After the confession is over, they should return and kneel in prayer while the person receives the Blessed Sacrament and the sacrament of Extreme Unction.

If the sick person is unconscious, there is no question of confession and Holy Communion, of course. However, in any case, the priest will at least give conditional absolution to the sick one and administer Extreme Unction.

Sorrow Is Christian Emotion

Death is never an easy thing to bear, even for those who have the greatest faith. In spite of the faith that we have in God's promises, and the hope we have that

our dying loved one will soon be united to God, we find it hard to accept the loss that his or her death will bring us. Also, it is hard for us to see one we love suffering in death.

At the death of his mother, St. Monica, St. Augustine at first refused to express his sorrow. He felt that any expression of sorrow would in some way be a reflection on his confidence in God and on our Christian hope. Nevertheless, after a short time he found that he could not contain his grief and wept greatly at the loss of the mother he had loved so much. He had recognized clearly that in spite of our Christian faith and hope, the loss of a loved one in death brings a great deal of natural sorrow — sorrow which we need not be ashamed of at all and which is quite in keeping with our religion.

At a time like this, there is not very much that we can do to help the one dying except through our prayers. But it should be for us a great consolation to know that we have been able to assure for him the grace of dying fortified by the sacrament of Extreme Unction. For this is Christ's own gift to His followers to strengthen them in the face of oncoming death.

In the beginning of this pamphlet I wrote about giving a man Extreme Unction while he still had two months to live,

and it was right to do so. He was dying and needed to prepare for death. It would have been a cruel pity to withhold from him the fact that he was dying.

He was still interested in this world and wanted to talk about baseball, but he also wanted to prepare for his entrance into the next world. I gave him the sacrament that would most help him do this. I only hope that when it comes my turn to die, someone will do the same for me. And if death claims me quickly, that there will be a priest on hand to anoint my yet-warm body.

PRAYER FOR A HAPPY DEATH

GRANT, WE BESEECH THEE,
O LORD, THAT IN THE
HOUR OF OUR DEATH WE
MAY BE REFRESHED BY
THY HOLY SACRAMENTS
AND DELIVERED FROM ALL
GUILT, AND SO DESERVE
TO BE RECEIVED WITH JOY
INTO THE ARMS OF THY
MERCY. THROUGH CHRIST
OUR LORD. AMEN.

(Raccolta No. 649)

An indulgence of 3 years.

A plenary indulgence on the usual conditions, if the daily recitation of this prayer is continued for one month

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