



“How does God help when it hurts?”

(Anointing of the Sick and
Redemptive Suffering)



Opening Prayer

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. ... I fear no evil; for you are with me.”

—*Psalms 23:1, 4*

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

—*Matthew 11:28*

“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.”

—*John 14:1*

“And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.”

—*Mark 6:13*

“I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace.
In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

—*John 16:33*

Dive In: The Woman Who Wanted to Say Good-Bye

“Come fast. She’s at the end.” Father Jim Crismin, a priest of the Archdiocese of Denver, put on his collar and rushed to the hospital. There in the ICU lay a sixty-year-old woman on a respirator with her sisters at her side. She had been brain dead for ten days. All that remained was to give her the Anointing of the Sick and allow her family to say their good-byes. The end of her journey on earth had arrived.

As he had done many times, Fr. Jim took out his oils for the **ANOINTING** and opened his prayer book. He read the prayers, anointing her head and hands: “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.” As he finished tracing the Sign of the Cross on her hand, her eyes opened. She tried to sit up, rip the tubes out, and talk!

He had been prepared for this kind of thing in seminary, and he knew what to do. He turned to the woman’s sisters and explained that the

primary effect of this sacrament is spiritual healing and the grace to face death, but that sometimes a temporary physical healing is needed to make that possible. This woman, he gently suggested, might need to give or receive forgiveness from someone before she died. He asked, “Do you know who that might be?” Eyes wide, they slowly nodded. “She needs to be reconciled with her daughter.”

“Then get her here. Right away,” he said.

The daughter was already on her way to the hospital. She walked into the room expecting to find her mother unconscious or dead. She was amazed to find her mother sitting there, waiting for her. They reconciled with one another in tears and with great joy. Then the mother said good-bye, lay back down on the hospital bed, and died.

This is the power we find in the Anointing of the Sick, a sacrament where Jesus Christ himself comes to us to strengthen us, comfort us, and give us the healing we need—whether that healing be physical or spiritual.





Segment 1: The Problem of Suffering

1. **T or F?** Suffering was part of God's creation from the beginning.
2. This name means, "God is with us"—even in our suffering.
A) Emmanuel B) Moses C) Christ D) Noah

Segment 2: God Is with Us

1. The story of Fr. Gillick shows that when we're hurting, we need to _____.
A) yell at God C) put ourselves in a position to be found
B) keep smiling D) run away
2. When we allow our suffering to be joined with Christ's, we can experience our suffering being _____.
A) remembered B) redeemed C) extinguished D) surrendered

Segment 3: The Anointing of the Sick

1. The Anointing of the Sick confers a special grace on those who receive it, especially those in danger of death due to serious _____.

2. **T or F?** A person can receive this sacrament more than once.
3. The biblical roots of the Anointing of the Sick come from the Book of _____.
A) James B) John C) Jeremiah D) Revelation



“God never promised us freedom from ‘messiness,’ but his presence with us in it, strengthening us.”

TO THE HEART with

My favorite time of the year is Christmas. I loved it as a kid, and I still get excited about it as an adult. When I was a kid, I used to anticipate Santa, time with my family, and, of course, all those presents. Growing up I longed to hear two words: “Merry Christmas.”

Now that I am a priest, I still yearn for Christmas, but for very different reasons. I love hearing the story of Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem. I love the motley crew of visitors—from shepherds to Magi. And I love that manger ... I *really* love that manger. On the outskirts of Bethlehem, rocky caves had been used as stables since ancient times. Jesus was probably born in a cave like these, a resting place for sheep when they were sleeping. Jesus was born in a poor cave ... crowded with sheep ... in the cold night outside Bethlehem. There was no hospital, no nurse, no one to care for them.

You see, the Christmas story is more messy than merry. It’s about people like you and me, who live our lives in homes that, for most of the year, are not decorated like they are in December. It’s about people like you and me, who live in a world where bad things sometimes happen to good people. It’s about people like you and me, who live with tough questions and real problems. You see, life is messy. I am messy. You are messy. Christmas—the real Christmas story—reveals God’s desire to enter into a messy world. God loves us ... and all of our messiness. It’s easier for me to say, “Messy Christmas” than “Merry Christmas.”

God made a statement at Christmas. When he entered the world as a man, God chose to enter all of humanity. God still desires to enter *everything* human. God wants to enter human suffering. God wants to enter human sickness. God never



Flood

promised us freedom from “messiness,” but his presence with us in it, strengthening us. It might seem weird to think that God could be a part of things that are messy, but then again, God can enter anything he wants.

There are a few things in life that we can expect. We will experience highs and lows. We will experience good times and tough times. And, at some point in

our lives, we will come face to face with suffering and sickness. The good news is that we are not alone. In fact, Christ has entrusted the Church with the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick so that we might know that God is with us, even when we are sick. That’s an awesome gift—God entering every part of our lives.



Father Mark Toups

Find It!

What is the Catholic meaning of the word *lavabo*, and what is it used for?



Hero of the Week



Born:
January 3, 1840

Died:
April 15, 1889

Memorial:
May 10

Patron Saint of:
• people with leprosy

St. Damien of Molokai, Martyr of Charity

Getting assigned to Hawaii for work sounds like a great adventure in paradise, doesn't it?

Would you still be enthusiastic if you found out it was to live in a leper colony?

In the 1870s, when Hawaii was still a kingdom, a health crisis hit the islands. Hundreds of people were infected with various contagious diseases. Leprosy hit hard, and King Kamehameha ordered those who had this contagious disease to be sent to a colony on the island of Molokai in order to prevent the illness from spreading further.

Fr. Damien, a Belgian priest, had been serving in Oahu as a missionary for many years. When he heard the inhabitants of the colony were in desperate need of spiritual support, he volunteered to go. Fr. Damien not only provided the sacraments for this isolated community, he dressed wounds, painted houses, and built homes. He also made coffins and dug graves for proper burials.

In a letter to his brother, Fr. Damien expressed the whole of his mission in the secluded colony of Kalawao, "I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all to Jesus Christ." It became an opportunity for **REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING**, offered simply and in accordance with Christ's call to take up our crosses and follow his example.

He chose to stay with the community although the original plan was to cycle through four priests in order to limit their exposure and provide periods of respite. Fr. Damien embraced the work

he had before him, to make the colony more than just habitable. It was home. He had plans to enlarge the orphanage, build new community buildings, and continue to add construction projects.

Eventually he contracted leprosy, and it redoubled his efforts to complete as many of his projects as possible. By this time, the story of his courageous holiness had begun to spread around the world, and he was joined by four unlikely heroes: another Belgian priest, Fr. Louis-Lambert Conrardy; Mother Marianne Cope, who ran a hospital in New York (she was recently declared a saint); Joseph Dutton, a Civil War soldier; and James Sinnett, a nurse from Chicago.

It took these four people to take over the tasks Fr. Damien had been doing by himself.

When Fr. Damien died, he was laid to rest under the same tree where he napped upon his arrival. This gentle and sweet closure to a life dedicated to the ailing people in Molokai demonstrates that we can achieve great grace, Christ-like love, and heroism in the midst of pain and suffering—perhaps even because of it.

St. Damien, pray for us. Help us discover Christ's presence in our brokenness and pain.

Challenge of the Week

- ☐ **Invite friends or family to come with you to visit a hospital, nursing home, or someone who is elderly or homebound**, and pick an activity to share with them. Read or play cards or a board game, help them write letters, or play them some music and perhaps sing. Write about it in the space below, and come prepared to talk about it next week.
- ☐ **Evaluate your physical health**, and make a new commitment to improve your diet or get more exercise. Offer the extra effort as a sacrifice for someone who is chronically ill or disabled. Commit to what you are going to do by writing it in the space below.
- ☐ **Spend five minutes in prayer, looking closely at an image of Jesus Christ crucified or carrying his cross**. Write a prayer or reflection in the space below, and consider sharing it next week.

✝ Closing Prayer

“Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord ...”

—James 5:14

Lord, you suffered, and you felt alone on the cross. You are very close to us when we suffer, especially when we feel completely alone.

You always accept us just as we are, wounded by sadness and sin. But you love us too much to leave us that way. Thank you for the powerful graces we receive through anointing and for teaching us to accept our sufferings willingly, knowing that they bring us closer to you and help us to become the authentic and heroically loving people that you call us to be. Amen.

Taking It Home

For next week's "Review Game," be sure to read over the following ...

1. **Watch It!** questions (page 97)
2. **Wrap-Up**
3. **"What's That Word?"**
4. **Memory Verse**

Don't forget to do your **Challenge of the Week** (page 101)

Wrap-Up

It's one of the most mind-boggling mysteries of the Christian faith: If God is all-loving and all-powerful ... why does suffering exist?

To answer that question, we have to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden, to the sin of our first parents, whose actions brought very real consequences into the world, including ignorance, concupiscence, sickness, and death.¹ And just as God did not prevent the first man from sinning, he does not prevent all suffering. But the good news is that, "God permits evil in order to draw forth some greater good" (Thomas Aquinas).²

Here's the thing: God never promised us that life would be easy. What God promises is that he's with us when it's tough. He never leaves us. When we are tempted to doubt that God loves us because of what we are suffering, we need to look at the cross. The crucifix reminds us that God did not abandon us in our suffering, but allowed himself to experience the worst of it with us and for us. So, we never need to feel alone. Even when we feel like God has forgotten us, he never does. He loves us.

God doesn't take away the pain of this life; instead, he transforms it. As we offer our pain back to God, our sufferings unite with his and become a single

offering of prayer for the world and an opportunity for us to be purified and to practice heroic virtue. United with him, we get to do what Jesus did on the cross: suffer for the redemption of the world.

Anointing of the Sick is the sacrament where God shows his transforming and life-giving presence in our pain. In the book of James, we see that this sacrament has changed very little in 2,000 years:

"Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14-15).

In this sacrament, God gives us strength and courage, spiritual healing, and cleansing from sin; and sometimes he even works a physical healing. Vatican II restored the more ancient understanding that the sacrament of anointing is not only for those who are about to die but also for those who are seriously ill.

“What’s That Word?”

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Anointing of the Sick is one of the **SACRAMENTS OF HEALING**, given to those who are seriously ill, in danger of death, or are already dying. In the past, it was given only to those who were about to die, but today, the elderly and people who are suffering from long illnesses are able to receive the sacrament, as are people about to undergo serious surgery.

While some receive physical healing from anointing, the focus of the sacrament is spiritual healing, the forgiveness of sins, and the strength to endure the suffering that often accompanies illness. The prayers of the sacrament are a beautiful invitation to accept suffering, which unites us to Jesus who willingly suffered to save us from sin and death. (See also **VIATICUM**.)

REDEMPITIVE SUFFERING

God did not create people to suffer. When our first parents sinned, they introduced suffering into their lives and the lives of others. We do the same when we sin. The good news is that by his passion and death on the cross, Jesus showed that suffering can lead to new and eternal life—for us and for others. In other words, suffering can be *redemptive*.

Just as Jesus suffered for us, he invites us to offer our sufferings back to him, to bring life back to ourselves and to others. Many of the saints took Jesus up on his invitation. When we accept suffering without complaint, we participate in Jesus’ saving work. Praying in front of a crucifix or placing a crucifix nearby can help us to keep our own suffering in perspective and remember how powerful suffering can be. (See also **PENANCE**.)



Memory Verse:

“... upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.”

— Isaiah 53:5

Any questions?

When should I
call a priest for
Anointing of the Sick?

Definitely call if someone is in danger of dying. Parishes usually have an emergency line for that. But you don't have to wait that long! This sacrament is not just for people on the verge of death. If someone is about to have surgery, has a terminal or persistent illness, or is very old,³ he or she is a candidate for anointing.

Did You Know?

St. Francis of Assisi, a rich and generous Italian nobleman, was captured in a military battle and spent a year praying in a filthy dungeon, ill with fever. Later, he left all his riches behind to start the Franciscan Order, known for its service to the poor and sick.