



Sacrament of the Sick

Rev. Fr. Shahe Archpriest Altounian

THE SACRAMENT OF THE SICK

This is a Sacrament which is administered to those who are found in stress and under the strain of an illness and which may lead them to bodily death.

This anointment of the sick existed even before Christ and who in turn practiced it many times, as we read in the Gospel according to St. Mark 6: 12-13... "Anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them". Also in the Epistle of St. James 5: 14-16.. "Is any man sick among you? Let him send for the priest of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man."

It is evident from the second quotation, that the important thing is the faith first, on the part of the sick person and second, on the part of the priest who will say the prayers. The administration of this Sacrament today consists of a gospel reading, the administration of Holy Communion, the kissing of the cross and a few prayers.

For those who are interested in history, let it be known that until about the 9th or 10th century the Armenian church did administer this Sacrament in its original form, because in the regulations (No. 11) of the Council of Touin in 720 A.D., in the time of Hovhannes Otznetzy the Catholicos of all Armenians, it is mentioned that not only Bishops but even priests may bless the oil which is to be used for the sick. Let it be known that this oil is not the same as the one used at Baptism, which is only prepared by the Catholicos at Holy Etchmiadzin. The former is only olive oil which is commonly used for such devout purposes.

Let us add that an anointment with the Holy Chrism is performed only on the deceased clergy, on their forehead and the back of the hand. This of course cannot be considered as the Sacrament of the Sick itself in the strictest sense of the word.

Speaking of praying and anointing the sick it needs to be mentioned that some superstitions exist in our peoples' mind. Most think that when someone is seriously ill and the priest comes, it is a bad sign or prediction that he will die. This points to the lack of faith in the members of the family, while emphasis is placed on medicine, and life hereafter is forgotten.

These people are sometimes moved by false kindness toward their patient. The idea here is that "It is cruel to let the sick man know he is on the danger list". On such occasions no one tells the truth to the patient. They try to cover everything. In most cases it is true that the patient will suffer less if and when he knows what his situation is, rather than being uncertain indefinitely.

And who can better and further encourage the patient but the priest,

who with the authority vested upon him, and with his prayers gives a new hope of life, a new attitude to the sick person. He never hinders the patient's progress. Therefore, both the Chrismation and this Sacrament of the Sick are to be looked upon as preparation for a battle. At the Chrismation a young warrior, a child of God, is anointed. Here the same warrior, only much older and defeated many times by sins during his life, once again needs strength to stand the physical suffering he is undergoing. Who is the person who will refuse this?

by order of
ARCHBISHOP VATCHE HOVSEPAN
Primate

A YACE Publication

A Publication of
The Western Diocese
of the
Armenian Church of North America
Youth Activities and Christian Education
Department

Feast of St. Ghevont
Feb. 28, 1984.