

26. THE CHURCH PREPARES US FOR GOD'S KINGDOM

In all our lessons this year, we have been talking about life — the new life given to us in God's Kingdom by Jesus Christ. And we know that we can participate now in God's life through our life in the Church.

We know also that sickness and suffering and death are very much a part of our life in this world. We cannot keep food very long before it rots and decays — before it dies. Unless we take good care of our plants and trees they, too, soon die. In fact, even when we do care for them, they still eventually wither and die. And we know that we ourselves are in a constant process of growing and dying. Everyday some cells in our bodies die and are replaced by new ones. But, eventually, our bodies become tired, and as we grow old the new cells do not grow so fast and soon our bodies also die. As they do, we often undergo much sickness and suffering. We only have to remember how much a tooth that has a cavity and is dying hurts in order to have some idea of what suffering and decay mean.

But God does not intend us to suffer. God does not want us to die. God Himself is love and life. He gives His love and life to us. It is only when men turn away from God and try to live independently of Him that they separate themselves from God's love and lose their power to live. This is what happened to Adam and Eve and to all their children after them. When men cut themselves off from God, from the source of life, the result is death. What happens to man can be compared to what happens when we use an electric appliance, such as a toaster or an iron. To make it run, it must be plugged into a socket or a source of energy. As soon as it is unplugged and cut off from that en-

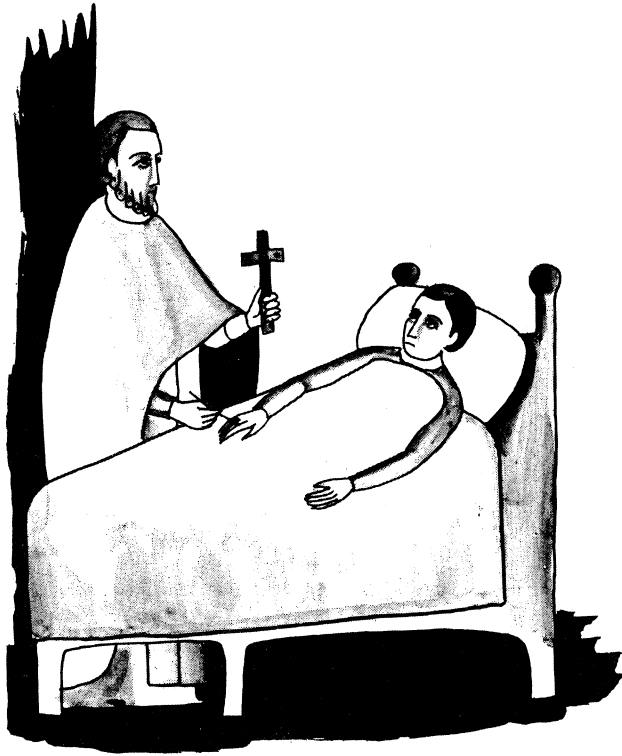
ergy, it soon loses its heat or power and stops. When we disconnect ourselves from God, we lose our source of energy and life. The only eventual result of life away from God — the source of our energy — is death.

But God does not leave man to an eternal death. God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save man from death. Jesus Christ became a man. He came to live in the world as a man, to suffer in it with us and to die with us as all men die. God Himself did this.

But because God is love and life, He is also stronger than death. Because Jesus Christ the man was also God, he brought a new meaning to suffering and death. By rising from the dead, He showed us that life does not end with death. He showed us that there is a life stronger than death and this is the new life of the Kingdom which He gives to us. When we receive the sacraments of the Church, we begin to live that new life of God's Kingdom and to make it a part of our life now.

What happens to us in this **Sacrament of Holy Unction**, the sacrament of oil and healing? This sacrament is not to be seen as something that can work a miracle, that can make a person well again after all doctors and medicines fail. Sometimes it does make a person physically well again, but there is another and more important meaning to this Sacrament of Oil. It is really a preparation for God's Kingdom, for the **new life** that is given to us by Jesus Christ.

Several things happen as the Sacrament of Oil is celebrated. First, the Church — the people of God — gather together with the



sick person to share in his sufferings. We all remember times when we have been sick and in bed. At those times, it is a special comfort to us just to have our mother or father, sister or brother, or a good friend stay nearby or to sit by our bed. They sometimes do not have to say or do anything, but just **be there** to help make us feel better. We know that because of their love for us, they are somehow sharing our pain and suffering, and their very presence makes our suffering easier.

The fact that a few members of the Church come to the bed of a sick person to celebrate the Sacrament of Oil shows their love and desire to help share in his suffering. They are there as witnesses of the love and concern of the Church and of Jesus Christ Himself. The Church is love, she is our Mother, and she is always there to guide us in all our life — in our sickness and health, in our suffering and joy.

Second, the Church reminds us in this Sacrament of what suffering and death actually mean. She reminds us that suffering and death are a result of man's sinfulness and

life away from God. She reminds us also that, in order to overcome suffering and death, Jesus Himself had to suffer and die for us. But He did all this for us because He loved us so much.

Now, our suffering and death can have a new meaning. They can be a reminder to us that if we truly love God and see Him as the real source of life, we can learn to bear our sufferings because we know that death is not the end of our life. Then our suffering and death can again be a real preparation for God's Kingdom. Then we can join that long procession of martyrs to the Kingdom — the men and women who no longer feared death because they knew that God's love and life had conquered death. They knew that Christ Himself had "trampled down death by (His) death" and given us new life. For them, death was not the end of life, but the beginning of life. The "birthday" of the martyr was celebrated by the Church not on the anniversary of his birth into this world, but on the anniversary of his death in this world — his birth into the new life of the Kingdom of Heaven.



The Service of the Sacrament of Oil Consists of these Sections:

1. **Introductory Prayers and Psalms** (Psalms 143 and 51)

In these Psalms, we confess our sinfulness before God and ask Him to cleanse us and make a "new and right spirit within us." (Psalm 51:10).

2. **Canon** (series of verses that are read or sung)

In these verses, we ask God to show mercy upon us and cleanse our souls. We ask Him to drive away all evil powers, to grant salvation to those who are sick or suffering, and to grant us the healing of our souls and bodies. At the end of several sets of verses, we ask God to renew our lives so that we may bless, thank and glorify God forever.

3. **Short Prayers or Troparia to the Saints**

We pray to the saints — especially those who have helped the sick and suffering, and to those who have suffered themselves as martyrs for the glory of God — and to the Mother of God to intercede for us for the salvation of our souls.

4. **Epistle and Gospel Lessons**

There are seven sets of Epistle and Gospel readings. After each set, the priest anoints the sick person with the Holy Oil. Read the first set together with the members of your class. (James 5:10-17 and Luke 10:25-38)

5. **Prayers of Anointing and Closing Prayers**

Each time the priest anoints the sick person, he reads a long prayer which asks for the remission of the person's sins, for the healing of his soul and body, and for life everlasting.

Activities

Look up the following Epistle and Gospel lessons from the Service of the Sacrament of Oil and draw lines connecting them to the sentences which tell what they teach us.

Luke 10:25-38

The instruction to us to pray for the sick and anoint them with Holy Oil.

James 5:10-15

The lesson which tells us that love (charity) is the gift that all members of the Church must have and use.

I Corinthians 12:27; 13:1-8

The lesson which shows Jesus healing and caring for men.

Matthew 10:5-9

The lesson of the man who showed us that we must care for all our fellowmen, regardless of whether we know them or not.

Matthew 8:14-24

The lesson which speaks of Jesus sending His disciples to heal men of spiritual and physical sickness.

II Corinthians 1:8-12

The lesson which tells us that God has delivered us from death.

Matthew 25:1-14

The lesson which tells us that we must be prepared to enter God's Kingdom.