



Word on Worship

Newsletter of the Worship Office, Archdiocese of Newark, NJ

In This Issue:

- Doctrinal Congregation Instruction on Prayer for Healing
- Commentary on Instruction on Prayer for Healing

Editor's note:

The Worship Office often receives inquiries about what is commonly referred to as a "Healing Mass." To provide guidance, we are pleased to reprint in this issue (with permission of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) the "Instruction on Prayer for Healing," approved by Pope John Paul II. It is followed by a reflective commentary that helps raise questions for those involved in liturgy preparation and ministry to the sick.

Rev. Charles Pinyan
Editor

INTRODUCTION

The longing for happiness, deeply rooted in the human heart, has always been accompanied by the desire to be freed from illness and to be able to understand its meaning when it is experienced. This is a human phenomenon which in some way concerns every person and which finds particular resonance in the church, where sickness is understood as a means of union with Christ and of spiritual purification.

Moreover, for those who find themselves in the presence of a sick person, it is an occasion for the exercise of charity. But this is not all, because sickness, like other forms of human suffering, is an important moment for prayer, whether asking for grace or for the ability to accept sickness in a spirit of faith and conformity with God's will or asking for healing.

Prayer for the restoration of health is therefore part of the church's experience in every age including our own. What is in some ways new is the proliferation of prayer meetings at times combined

with liturgical celebrations for the purpose of obtaining healing from God. In many cases the occurrence of healings has been proclaimed, giving rise to the expectation of the same phenomenon in other such gatherings. In this context, appeal is sometimes made to a claimed charism of healing.

These prayer meetings for obtaining healing present the question of their proper discernment from a liturgical perspective; this is the particular responsibility of the church's authorities, who are to watch over and give appropriate norms for the proper functioning of liturgical celebrations.

It has seemed opportune, therefore, to publish an instruction, in accordance with Canon 34 of *The Code of Canon Law*, above all as a help to local ordinaries so that the faithful may be better guided in this area through the promotion of what is good and the correction of what must be avoided. It was necessary, however, that these disciplinary determinations be given their point of reference within a well-founded doctrinal framework to ensure a correct approach and to make clear the reasoning behind the norms. For this reason, the disciplinary section is preceded by a doctrinal presentation on the graces of healing and prayers for healing.

DOCTRINAL ASPECTS

1 MEANING AND VALUE OF SICKNESS AND HEALING IN THE ECONOMY OF SALVATION

"People are called to joy. Nevertheless, each day they experience many forms of suffering and pain."¹ Therefore the Lord, in his promises of redemption, announces the heartfelt joy that comes from liberation from sufferings (cf. Is 30:29; 35:10; Bar 4:29). Indeed, he is the one "who delivers from every evil" (Wis 16:8). Among the different forms of suffering, those which accompany illness are continually present in human history and thus are included in man's deep desire to be delivered from every evil.

In the Old Testament, "it is the experience of Israel that illness is mysteriously linked to sin and evil."² Among the punishments threatened by God for the people's unfaithfulness, sickness has a prominent place (cf. Dt 28:21-22, 27-29, 35). The sick person who beseeches God for healing confesses to have been justly punished for his sins (cf. Ps. 37: 40; 106:17-21).

Sickness, however, also strikes the just, and people wonder why. In the Book of Job, this question occupies many pages. "While it is true that suffering has meaning as punishment when it is connected with a fault, it is not true that all suffering is a consequence of a fault and has the nature of a punishment. The figure of the

Doctrinal Congregation Instruction on Prayer For Healing

just man Job is a special proof of this in the Old Testament.... And if the Lord consents to test Job with suffering, he does it to demonstrate the latter's righteousness. The suffering has the character of a test."³

Although sickness may have positive consequences as a demonstration of the faithfulness of the just person and for repairing the justice that is violated by sin, and also because it may bring a sinner to repent and set out on the way of conversion, it remains nonetheless an evil. For this reason, the prophet announces the future times in which there will be no more disease and infirmity, and the course of life will no longer be broken by death (cf. Is 35:5-6; 65:19-20).

The question of why illness also afflicts the just finds its complete answer, however, in the New Testament. Jesus' encounters with the sick during his public ministry were not isolated but continual. He healed many through miracles, so that miraculous healings characterized his activity: Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness" (Mt 9:35; cf. 4:23).

These healings are signs of his messianic mission (cf. Lk 7:20-23). They manifest the victory of the kingdom of God over every kind of evil and become the symbol of the restoration to health of the whole human person, body and soul. They serve to demonstrate that Jesus has the power to forgive sins (cf. Mk 2:1-12); they are signs of the salvific goods, as is the healing of the paralytic of Bethesda (cf. Jn 5:2-9, 19-21) and the man born blind. (cf. Jn 9).

The first preaching of the Gospel, as related in the New Testament, was accompanied by numerous miraculous healings which corroborated the power of the Gospel proclamation. This had been the promise of the risen Jesus, and the first Christian communities witnessed its realization in their midst: "These signs will accompany those who believe: ... They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover (Mk 16:17-18). The preaching of Philip in Samaria was accompanied by miraculous healings: "Philip went down to a city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ to them. With one accord the crowds paid attention to what was said by Philip when they heard it and saw the signs he was doing. For unclean spirits, crying out in a loud voice, came out of many possessed people, and many paralyzed and crippled people were cured" (Acts 8:5-7).

St. Paul describes his own proclamation of the Gospel as characterized by signs and wonders worked by the power of the Holy Spirit: "For I will not dare to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to lead the gentiles to obedience by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit" (Rom 15:18-19; cf. 1 The 1:5; 1 Cor 2:4-5). It would not be arbitrary to suppose that these signs and wonders, manifestations of the power of God that accompanied the preaching of the Gospel, were constituted in large part by miraculous healings. Such wonders were not limited to St. Paul's ministry, but were also occurring among the faithful: "Does then the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works mighty deeds among you do so from works



of the law or from faith in what you have heard preached?" (Gal 3:5).

The messianic victory over sickness, as over other human sufferings, does not happen only through its elimination by miraculous healing, but also because the voluntary and innocent suffering of Christ in his passion gives every person the possibility of uniting himself to the Lord's sufferings. In fact, "Christ himself, though without sin, suffered in his passion pains and torments of every type, and made his own the sorrows of all men: Thus he brought to fulfillment what had been written of him by the prophet Isaiah (cf. Is 53:4-5)."⁴ But there is more: "In the cross of Christ not only is the redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human

suffering itself has been redeemed.... In bringing about the redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of the redemption. Thus each man in his suffering can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ."⁵

The church not only welcomes the sick as recipients of her loving care, but also recognizes that they "are called to live their human and Christian vocation and to participate in the growth of the kingdom of God in a new and even more valuable manner. The words of the apostle Paul ought to become their approach to life or, better yet, cast an illumination to permit them to see the meaning of grace in their very situation: 'In my flesh I complete what

is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church' (Col 1:24). Precisely in arriving at this realization, the apostle is raised up in joy: 'I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake' (Col 1:24)."⁶ It is a paschal joy, fruit of the Holy Spirit, and like St. Paul, "in the same way many of the sick can become bearers of the 'joy inspired by the Holy Spirit in much affliction' (1 Thes 1:6) and be witnesses to Jesus' resurrection."⁷

2. THE DESIRE FOR HEALING AND PRAYER TO OBTAIN HEALING

Presuming the acceptance of God's will, the sick person's desire for healing is both good and deeply human, especially when it takes the form of trusting prayer addressed to God. The Book of Sirach exhorts: "My son, when you are ill, delay not, but pray to God, who will heal you" (Sir 38:9). A number of psalms also ask for healing (cf. Ps 6; 37; 40; 87).

Large numbers of the sick approached Jesus during his public ministry, either directly or through friends and relatives, seeking restoration of their health. The Lord welcomes their requests, and the Gospels contain not even a hint of reproach for these prayers. The Lord's only complaint is about their possible lack of faith: "If you can! Everything is possible to one who has faith" (Mk 9:23; cf. Mk 6:5-6; Jn. 4:48).

Not only is it praiseworthy for individual members of the faithful to ask for healing for themselves and for others, but the church in her liturgy asks the Lord for the health of the sick. Above all, there is the sacrament "especially intended to strengthen those who are

being tried by illness, the anointing of the sick."⁸ "The church has never ceased to celebrate this sacrament for its members by the anointing and the prayer of its priests, commending those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, that he may raise them up and save them."⁹ In the blessing of the oil immediately prior to the anointing, the church prays: "Make this oil a remedy for all who are anointed with it; heal them in body, in soul and in spirit, and deliver them from every affliction"¹⁰ and then, in the first two prayers after the anointing, the healing of the sick person is requested.¹¹ Since the sacrament is a pledge and promise of the future kingdom, it is also a proclamation of the resurrection, when "there shall be no more death or mourning, crying out or pain, because the old order has passed away" (Rv 21:4). Furthermore, the Roman Missal contains a Mass *pro infirmis* in which, in addition to spiritual graces, the health of the sick is requested.¹²

In the *De Benedictionibus* of the *Rituale Romanum*, there is an *Ordo Benedictionis Infirmorum*, in which there are various prayers for healing: in the second formulary of the *preces*,¹³ in the four *orationes benedictioni pro adultis*,¹⁴ in the two *orationes benedictioni pro pueris*¹⁵ and in the prayer of the *ritus brevior*.¹⁶

Obviously, recourse to prayer does not exclude, but rather encourages the use of effective natural means for preserving and restoring health, and also leads the church's sons and daughters to care for the sick and to assist them in body and spirit by seeking to overcome disease. Indeed, "part of the plan laid out in God's providence is that we should

fight strenuously against all sickness and carefully seek the blessings of good health."¹⁷

3. THE "CHARISM OF HEALING" IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Not only did wondrous healings confirm the power of the Gospel proclamation in apostolic times, but the New Testament refers also to Jesus' specific bestowal of the power to heal illnesses on his apostles and the first preachers of the Gospel. In the call of the Twelve to their first mission, according to the accounts of Matthew and Luke, the Lord gave them "the power to drive out unclean spirits and to cure every disease and illness" (Mt 10:1; cf. Lk. 9:1), and commanded them: "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons" (Mt 10:8). In sending out the 72 disciples, the Lord charges them: "Cure the sick" (Lk 10:9). The power to heal, therefore, is given within a missionary context, not for their own exaltation but to confirm their mission.

The Acts of the Apostles refers in general to the wonders worked by the apostles: "Many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles" (Acts 2:43; cf. 5:12). These were amazing deeds that manifested the truth and the power of their mission. However, apart from these brief general references, the Acts of the Apostles refers above all to the miraculous healings worked by individual preachers of the Gospel: Stephen (cf. Acts 6:8), Philip (cf. Acts 8:6-7) and, above all, Peter (cf. Acts 3:1-10; 5:15; 9:33-34, 40-41) and Paul (cf. Acts 14:3, 8-10; 15:12; 19:11-12; 20:9-10; 28:8-9).

In the conclusion to the Gospel of Mark, as well as in the Letter to the Galatians, as seen above, the perspective is

broadened. The wondrous healings are not limited to the activity of the apostles and certain central figures in the first preaching of the Gospel. In this perspective, the references to the "charisms of healing" in 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30 assume a special importance. The meaning of *charism* is per se quite broad — "a generous gift" — and in this context refers to "gifts of healing obtained." These graces, in the plural, are attributed to an individual (cf. 1 Cor 12:9), and are not, therefore, to be understood in a distributive sense as the gifts of healing received by those who themselves have been healed, but rather as a gift granted to a person to obtain the grace of healing for others. This is given *by the one Spirit*, but nothing is specified about how that person obtains these healings. It would not be far-fetched to think that it happens by means of prayer, perhaps accompanied by some symbolic gesture.

In the Letter of James, reference is made to the church's action, by means of the priests, directed toward the salvation — in a physical sense as well — of the sick. But this is not to be understood as a wondrous healing; it is different from the "charisms of healing" of 1 Corinthians 12:9. "Is anyone sick among you? He should call for the priests of the church and have them 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 will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven" (Jas 5:14-15). This refers to a sacramental action: anointing of the sick with oil and prayer "over him" and not simply "for him." as though it were

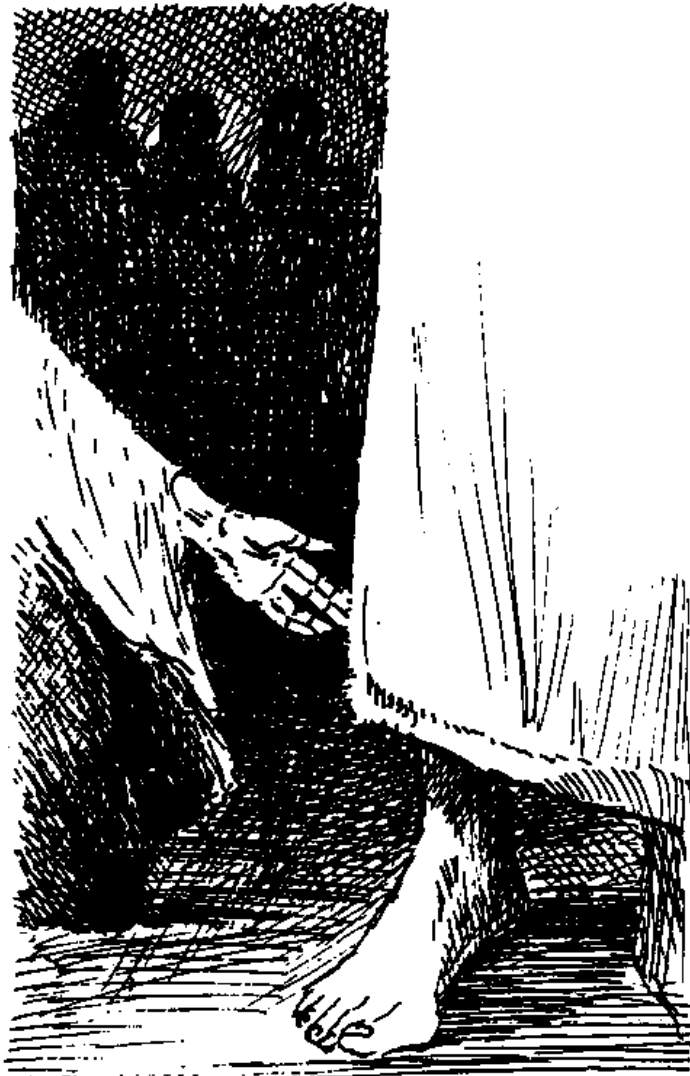
only a prayer of intercession or petition; it is rather an efficacious action over the sick person.¹⁸

The verbs *will save* and *will raise up* do not suggest an action aimed exclusively or predominantly at physical healing, but in a certain way include it. The first verb, which elsewhere in the Letter of James refers to spiritual salvation (cf. Jas 1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:20), is used also in the New Testament with the sense of *to heal* (cf. Mt. 9:21; Mk. 5:28, 34; 6:56; 10:52; Lk. 8:48); the second verb, while having at times the sense of *to rise* or *to raise* (cf. Mt 10:8; 11:5; 14:2) is used also to indicate the action of *lifting up* a person who is lying down because of illness, by healing the person

in a wondrous fashion (cf. Mt 9:5; Mk 1:31; 9:27; Acts 3:7).

4. PRAYERS TO OBTAIN HEALING FROM GOD IN THE CHURCH'S TRADITION

The fathers of the church considered it normal that believers would ask God not only for the health of their soul, but also for that of their body. With regard to the goods of life, health and physical integrity, St. Augustine writes: "We need to pray that these are retained when we have them, and that they are increased when we do not have them."¹⁹ St. Augustine has also left us the testimony of a friend's healing, obtained through the prayers of a bishop, a priest and some deacons in his house.²⁰



The same perspective is found in both the Eastern and Western liturgical rites. One of the prayers after communion of the Roman Missal asks, "May the power of this heavenly gift take hold of our minds and bodies."²¹ In the liturgy of Good Friday, Christians are invited to pray to God the Father Almighty that he "may keep diseases away ... and grant health to the sick."²² Among the texts that are most significant is the blessing of the oil of the sick, which asks God to pour forth his holy blessing so that all "those who are anointed with it may receive healing in body, soul and spirit, and be delivered from all sadness, all weakness and suffering."²³

The expressions used in the prayers of the anointing of the sick in the Eastern rites are very similar. For example, in the anointing of the sick in the Byzantine rite, there is the prayer: "Holy Father, doctor of souls and bodies, you who sent your only begotten Son Jesus Christ to cure every disease and to free us from death, heal also your servant from the infirmity of body and spirit that afflicts him, by the grace of your Christ."²⁴ In the Coptic rite, the Lord is invoked to bless the oil so that all who will be anointed with it will obtain health of spirit and body. Then, during the anointing of the sick person, the priests make mention of Jesus Christ, who was sent into the world "to heal all sicknesses and to free from death" and ask God "to heal the sick person of the infirmities of body and to grant him the right path."²⁵

5. THE "CHARISM OF HEALING" IN THE PRESENT-DAY CONTEXT

In the course of the church's history there have been holy miracle workers who have

performed wondrous healings. This was not limited to the apostolic period; however, the so-called "charism of healing," about which it seems appropriate to offer some doctrinal clarifications, does not fall within these phenomena of wonder-working. Instead, the present question is that of special prayer meetings organized for the purpose of obtaining wondrous healings among the sick who are present or prayers of healing after eucharistic communion for this same purpose.

There is abundant witness throughout the church's history to healings connected with places of prayer (sanctuaries, in the presence of the relics of martyrs or other saints, etc.). In antiquity and during the Middle Ages such healings contributed to the popularity of pilgrimages to sanctuaries such as that of St. Martin of Tours or the Cathedral of St. James in Compostela as well as many others. The same also happens today at Lourdes, as it has for more than a century. Such healings, however, do not imply a "charism of healing," because they are not connected with a person who has such a charism, but they need to be taken into account when we evaluate the above-mentioned prayer meetings from a doctrinal perspective.

With respect to prayer services for healing, an aim which is certainly influential even if not exclusive in their planning, it is appropriate to distinguish between meetings connected to a "charism of healing," whether real or apparent, and those without such a connection. A possible "charism of healing" can be attributed when the intervention of a specific person or persons, or of a specific category of persons



(for example, the directors of the group that promotes the meetings), is viewed as determinative for the efficacy of the prayer. If there is no connection with any “charism of healing” then the celebrations provided in the liturgical books, if they are done with respect for liturgical norms, are obviously licit and often appropriate, as in the case of a Mass *pro infirmis*. If the celebrations do not respect liturgical law, they lack legitimacy.

In sanctuaries, other celebrations are frequently held which may not be aimed *per se* at asking God specifically for graces of healing, but in which, in the intentions of the organizers and participants, the obtaining of healing has an important part. With this purpose in mind, both liturgical and nonliturgical services are held: liturgical celebrations (such as exposition of the Blessed Sacrament with Benediction) and nonliturgical expressions of popular piety encouraged by the church (such as the solemn recitation of the rosary). These celebrations are

legitimate as long as their authentic sense is not altered. For example, one could not place on the primary level the desire to obtain the healing of the sick in a way which might cause adoration of the Blessed Sacrament to lose its specific finality, which is to “bring the faithful to recognize in the eucharist the wonderful presence of Christ and to invite them to a spiritual union with him, a union which finds its culmination in sacramental communion.”²⁶

The “charism of healing” is not attributable to a specific class of faithful. It is quite clear that St. Paul, when referring to various charisms in 1 Corinthians 12, does not attribute the “charism of healing” to a particular group, whether apostles, prophets, teachers, those who govern or any other. The logic which governs the distribution of such gifts is quite different: “One and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person just as the Spirit chooses” (1 Cor 12:11). Consequently, in prayer services organized to ask for

healing, it would be completely arbitrary to attribute a “charism of healing” to any category of participants, for example, to the directors of the group; instead, there should be trust in the free decision of the Holy Spirit, who grants to some a special charism of healing in order to show the power of the grace of the risen Christ. Yet not even the most intense prayer obtains the healing of all sicknesses. So it is that St. Paul had to learn from the Lord that “my grace is enough for you: my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9), and that the meaning of the experience of suffering can be that “in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col 1:24).

II. DISCIPLINARY NORMS

Article 1 It is licit for every member of the faithful to pray to God for healing. When this is organized in a church or other sacred place, it is appropriate that such prayers be led by an ordained minister.

Article 2 Prayers for healing are considered to be liturgical if they are found in the liturgical books approved by the church’s competent authority; otherwise, they are nonliturgical.

Article 3.1 Liturgical prayers for healing are celebrated according to the rite and with the proper sacred vestments prescribed in the *Ordo Benedictionis Infirmorum* of the *Rituale Romanum*.²⁷

—2 In conformity with what is stated in the *Praenotanda. V, De Aptationibus Quae Conferentiae Episcoporum Competunt*²⁸ of the same *Rituale Romanum*, conferences

of bishops may introduce those adaptations to the Rite of Blessings of the Sick which are held to be pastorally useful or possibly necessary, after prior review by the Apostolic See.

Article 4.1 The diocesan bishop²⁹ has the right to issue norms for his own particular church regarding liturgical services of healing, following Canon 838.4.

—2 These norms are to be followed by those who prepare such liturgical services of healing.

—3 Permission to hold such services must be given explicitly, even if they are organized by bishops or cardinals or include such as participants. For a just and proportionate reason, the diocesan bishop has the right to forbid the participation of another bishop.

Article 5.1 Nonliturgical prayers for healing, as gatherings for prayer or for reading the word of God, are conducted differently from liturgical celebrations; they come under the vigilance of the local ordinary in accordance with Canon 839.2.

—2 Confusion between such free nonliturgical prayers and liturgical celebrations properly so-called is to be carefully avoided.

—3 Anything resembling hysteria, artificiality, theatricality or sensationalism should be absent from such gatherings, above all on the part of those who are in charge.

Article 6 The use of means of communication (in particular television) while liturgical or nonliturgical

prayers for healing are being conducted comes under the vigilance of the diocesan bishop in conformity with Canon 823 and the norms established by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its instruction of March 30, 1992.³⁰

Article 7.1 Without prejudice to what is established above in Article 3 or the celebrations for the sick provided in the liturgical books, prayers for healing — whether liturgical or nonliturgical — must not be introduced into the celebration of the holy eucharist, the sacraments or the Liturgy of the Hours.

—2 In the celebrations referred to in .1, special prayer intentions for the healing of the sick may be included in the general intercessions or prayers of the faithful when this is provided for.

Article 8.1 The ministry of exorcism must be exercised in strict dependence on the diocesan bishop, in keeping with the norm of Canon 1172, the letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of Sept. 29, 1985,³¹ and the *Rituale Romanum*.³²

—2 The prayers of exorcism contained in the *Rituale Romanum* must remain separate from healing services, whether liturgical or nonliturgical.

—3 It is absolutely forbidden to insert such prayers of exorcism into the celebration of the holy Mass, the sacraments or the Liturgy of the Hours.

Article 9 Those who direct healing services, whether liturgical or nonliturgical, are

to strive to maintain a climate of peaceful devotion in the assembly and to exercise the necessary prudence if healings should take place among those present; when the celebration is over, they may carefully and accurately gather any testimonies and submit these to the competent ecclesiastical authority.

Article 10 Authoritative intervention by the diocesan bishop is proper and necessary when abuses are verified in liturgical or nonliturgical healing services, or when obvious scandal is given to the community of the faithful, or when there is a serious lack of observance of liturgical or disciplinary norms.

The sovereign pontiff John Paul II, in an audience granted to the undersigned cardinal prefect, approved the present instruction, adopted in ordinary session of this congregation, and ordered its publication.

Rome, from the offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Sept. 14, 2000, the feast of the Triumph of the Cross.

*Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger
Prefect*

*Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone,
SDB
Secretary*

Notes

- ¹ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*. 53: AAS 81(1989) 498.
- ² Catechism of the Catholic Church 1502.
- ³ John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*. 11: AAS 76 (1984), 212.
- ⁴ *Rituale Romanum, Ex Decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum, Auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum, Ordo Unctionis Infirmorum eorumque Pastoralis Curae, ed. typica, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, MCMLXXII*, 2.
- ⁵ *Salvifici Doloris*, 19.
- ⁶ *Christifideles Laici*. 53: AAS 81(1989) 499.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.
- ⁸ Catechism, 1511.
- ⁹ Cf. *Ordo Unctionis*, 5.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.
- ¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 77.
- ¹² *Missale Romanum, Ex Decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum, Auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum, ed. typica altera, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, MCMLXXV*, 838-839.
- ¹³ Cf. *Rituale Romanum, Ex Decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum, Auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum, De Benedictionibus, ed. typica, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, MCMLXXXIV*, 305.
- ¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 306-309.
- ¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 315-316.
- ¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 319.
- ¹⁷ *Ordo Unctionis*, 73.
- ¹⁸ Cf. Council of Trent, Sess. XIV *Doctrina de Sacramento Extremae Unctionis*, Cap. 2: DS 1696.
- ¹⁹ St. Augustine, *Epistulae* 130, VI, 13 (PL33, 499).
- ²⁰ Cf. St. Augustine. *De Civitate Dei* 22, 8, 3 (PL41, 762-763).
- ²¹ Cf. *Missale Romanum*, 563.
- ²² *Ibid.*, *Oratio Universalis, X (Pro Tribulatis)*, 256.
- ²³ *Ordo Unctionis*, 75.
- ²⁴ J. Goar, *Euchologion sive Rituale Graecorum*, Venetiis 1730 (Graz 1960), 338.
- ²⁵ H. Denzinger, *Ritus Orientalium in Administrandis Sacramentis*, vv. I-II, Wurzburg 1863 (Graz 1961), v. 11. 497-498.
- ²⁶ *Rituale Romanum (Auctoritate Pauli VI), De Sacra Communione et de Cultu Mysterii Eucharistici*

Extra Missam, editio typica, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, MCMLXXIII, 82.

- ²⁷ Cf. *De Benedictionibus*. 290-320.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.
- ²⁹ And those equivalent to him in law by virtue of Canon 381.2.
- ³⁰ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Some Aspects of the Use of the Instruments of Social Communication in Promoting the Doctrine of the Faith [March 30, 1992], Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992.
- ³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, *Epistula Inde ab Aliquot Annis, Ordinariis locorum missa: in mentem normae vigentes de exorcismis revocantur*, Sept. 29, 1985: AAS 77 (1985), 1169-1170.
- ³² Cf. *Rituale Romanum (Auctoritate Joannis Pauli II), De Exorcismus et Supplicationibus Quibusdam, editio typica, Typis Vaticanis, MIM, Praenotanda*. 13-19.

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Commentary on Instruction on Prayer for Healing

This Instruction from the Doctrinal Congregation addresses the growing practice of healing services. Noteworthy is the recognition that such a phenomenon as a “charism of healing” exists. At the same time the Instruction encourages bishops to exercise their episcopal office by overseeing healing services in their respective dioceses. The Instruction is very tentative: there is still a considerable vagueness and openness for discussion. (Who can control the workings of the Holy Spirit?) The whole issue of divine healing deserves much more reflection and discernment. To begin with, a clearer distinction needs to be made between charismatic healing and the sacrament of anointing of the sick. For example, the passage from James 5:14-16 is clearly not an instance of charismatic healing, but a sacramental action performed by the presbyters of the church. David Power, writing in the *The Heythrop Journal* 19 (1978) 262 put it this way: ...in the sacrament of the sick what is at stake is the sacramentality of sickness itself, or perhaps it would be better to say, the mystery which is revealed in the sick person who lives through this experience. In other words, the accent is not on healing, nor on forgiving, nor on preparing for death. It is on the sick person, who through this experience discovers God in a particular way and

reveals this to the community. Put in a wider perspective, the Church continues Christ’s ministry to the sick and dying on three inter-related levels: pastoral, sacramental, and charismatic. The pastoral ministry is carried out by those who care for the sick in hospitals or at home. The sacramental ministry is encompassed in *Pastoral Care*

followed in prayers for healing. Further pastoral questions arise. First of all, what is the place of non-sacramental anointings? The oil of the sick (*oleum infirmorum*), solemnly blessed by the bishop at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week, is only to be used with the celebration of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. The

Another question has to do with the phenomenon of a “healing Mass.” For example, your parish receives a request from a priest of a Catholic Pentecostal group who wants you to host a “charismatic healing Mass.” What are you to do? Before saying yes, prayerfully consider the following principles of discernment. (See Charles W. Gusmer, “Healing: Chrism or Sacrament” *Church* 2 (1986) 16-22).



of the Sick: *Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* (1983). The charismatic ministry would appear to be the principal concern of this instruction. Charismatic healing, associated with the charism of healing mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12: 9, 28, 30, is a gift of the Spirit given to some in order to build up the Body of Christ.

The Instruction provides disciplinary norms to be

Book of Blessings provides a “Blessing of Elements Connected with Devotion” (1781-1804) which includes a blessing of oil, presumably to be used with the sick. (See also the “Orders for the Blessing of the Sick” in the same *Book of Blessings*) No directions are given for its application. To avoid confusion, the use of this sacramental should be kept distinct from the Sacrament of Anointing.

- Does the service flow out of the local Christian community’s ongoing pastoral care of the sick? More specifically, is the healing service a big extravaganza which crowds the church building on a given day, or is it an expression of an ongoing ministry to the sick and afflicted exercised by the church community?
- Is the service pastorally responsible in terms of prior preparation and follow-up care? While an attitude of expectant faith should rightly be engendered, ministers preparing the participants should take time to present a sound pastoral theology of healing so as not to dash people’s expectations or even shatter their faith when an immediate cure is not forthcoming. Similarly, one-night stands without any further pastoral care and

attention would seem to be equally irresponsible and potentially disastrous.

- Is there a sense of cooperation with the medical profession? Healing cures are not intended to spare patients medical bills; as is abundantly clear in the Gospels; they are intended to show forth the glory of God and to lead to conversion of heart.
- Is there a proper emphasis on the worship of God and service of neighbor, rather than a narrowly selfish therapeutic attitude which delights in the “miraculous”? The ministry of the sick, both sacramental and charismatic, has always been particularly susceptible to magical attitudes which would try to achieve a “quick fix” without getting at the deeper

underlying Christian attitudes of surrender, trust, and love.

- Are healings, whenever and wherever they occur, signs pointing to a deepened faith and conversion in which the beneficiaries become changed or transformed persons? Even more important than the physical or emotional benefits of Jesus’ healing ministry was the fact that the people’s lives were turned around and they became his disciples.
- Is the approach imbued with the central mystery of the Christian faith, the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and our participation in this saving paschal event? Saint Paul has some very sharp words for those who are “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phlm 3:18). His own personal

confession of faith is one which every Christian is called to claim as well: “May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through it the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.” (Gal 6:14)

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Editor's note:

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