

Anointing of the Sick ([CCC 1499-1532](#))

Many non-Catholics who have little or no problem with other [sacraments](#) (such as [baptism](#), [matrimony](#) and even the [Eucharist](#)) find the anointing of the sick harder to accept. However, this sacrament is well attested in the early Church and is well-founded in Scripture, as well as being explicitly referenced there.

Understanding what the sacrament actually does

It is important to make a person [understand what the sacrament actually does](#) – it is not a form of guaranteed miracle healing, but rather aligns the person's spirit with that of Christ. The Catechism gives a clear description of what the sacrament does ([CCC 1532](#)) and it is important to note that “the restoration of health” only takes place “if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul”. Thus, while the sacrament certainly spiritually heals a person, it only accomplishes physical healing in so far as that is necessary for the salvation of a soul. The sacrament of the anointing of the sick is a primarily a spiritual healing rather than a physical one – and thus if someone is not physically healed as a result it does not mean that the sacrament is false.

The discussion of pain and suffering is covered in a [separate article](#).

Direct Scriptural References

There are two times when the sacrament is directly referenced in the Scriptures, and this should be enough for most [sola scriptura](#) Christians to accept that it was genuinely instituted by Christ. These references are [Mark 6:12-13](#) and [James 5:14-15](#). There are a number of key points to note about these passages.

Mark 6:12-13, “They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.”

James 5:14-15, “Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.”

In both these cases, those who are administering the [sacrament](#) are ordained [priests](#) (either the Twelve or the “presbyters” (or elders in some translations) which is where we get the word “priest” from). Also, although there is clear reference to prayer in addition, it is made very clear that the physical method of administering the sacrament is the anointing with oil – just as the Church does today. The healing of those anointed is clearly connected to the sacrament's administration.

Indirect Scriptural support & support from the writings of early Christians

As a sacrament the anointing of the sick takes its power and efficacy from the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Although many people think that Jesus's death merely forgives us our sins and does nothing to our physical illness, this is not supported by the prophet Isaiah nor the Gospel of

Matthew which quotes him; “this was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases’” ([Matthew 8:17](#)).

The sacrament is well-attested in the writings of the Church Fathers. Origen writes around 250 AD that the Christian who is truly sorry for his sins “does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest of the Lord and from seeking medicine . . . [of] which the apostle James says: ‘If then there is anyone sick, let him call the presbyters of the Church, and let them impose hands upon him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him’” (*Homilies on Leviticus 2:4*).

Bishop Serapion writes in the year 350 in *The Sacramentary of Serapion* 29:1, “We beseech you, Savior of all men, you that have all virtue and power, Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we pray that you send down from heaven the healing power of the only-begotten [Son] upon this oil, so that for those who are anointed . . . it may be effected for the casting out of every disease and every bodily infirmity . . . for good grace and remission of sins.”

Both of these references (as well as the two Scriptural references above) refer to the anointing of the sick and [confession](#) in the same breath – this is because the two sacraments are both [sacraments](#) of healing. This finds its truest expression in the fact that Jesus performed many of His healing miracles by saying “Your sins are forgiven”.

The anointing of the sick is both Scriptural and can be shown to have been performed since the earliest days of the Church. Much of the confusion surrounding this sacrament comes from the fact that it does not always produce instantaneous physical healing – an effect some non-Catholics think that it should have even though the Church has never taught that it should, and has in fact taught the healing value of [pain and suffering](#).