

## Reflection for the Baptism of the Lord

The New Year can be a testing and stressful time for many, especially with the difficulties we are encountering at the moment. So it is important to remember that we are made in the image and likeness of God and this is the bedrock of our dignity and self-esteem. We recognise and accept this gift at our baptism, the Sacrament instituted by Jesus at his own baptism in the Jordan as we hear in today's Gospel. He looks at us with love and invites us to look at others in the same way, as Jesus says in the Gospel: *"I give you a new commandment: love one another just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples."*<sup>1</sup> Difficult times and circumstances search our faith and in many cases produce a change, hopefully a deepening, of how and why we believe in a loving God. But for this to be the case we sometimes need additional support and prayer.

Serious illness can be a time when this happens and the Church has a sacrament to support us in these testing times in life. The Sacrament of the Sick or Anointing, as it is sometimes known, strengthens our faith through the reassurance that God is not punishing us or abandoning us but is with us at this most vulnerable time. Throughout the Gospels Jesus reaches out to the sick to console, heal and restore them to the community. One of the most touching stories is when Jesus is approached by a Leper who says to him *'You can heal me if you want to'* and Jesus replies *'of course I want to'*<sup>2</sup>. The Church believes that Jesus says that to those who turn to him in prayer at a time of serious illness and the Sacrament of the Sick is the sign that this is taking place through the community of the Church. Our healing begins when we turn to Jesus in baptism and continues throughout the journey of life including his care for us when our earthly pilgrimage comes to its conclusion. As we know from the Easter season our healing will be complete in mind, body and spirit in the resurrection of the dead when all will be restored. In the meantime we need strength in our various struggles.

The Sacrament of the Sick or Anointing came to be associated, amongst some people, with what was called *'the last rites'*. It is true that people can also be anointed in their final days but the Second Vatican Council encouraged us to seek this sacrament at the beginning of a serious illness even if it is expected that we will eventually recover. This is because an illness of this nature can lead to serious impairment in mind, body and spirit all of which can impact on our faith and relationships with others. In the liturgical book from which we take the prayers for anointing it says: *'Those who are seriously ill need the special help of God's grace in this time of anxiety, lest they be broken in spirit and, under the pressure of temptation, perhaps weakened in their faith. This is why, through the sacrament of anointing, Christ strengthens the faithful who are afflicted by illness, providing them with the strongest means of support.'*<sup>3</sup>

Our recently formed Parish SVP Conference are organising a Mass with anointing of the sick on the afternoon of Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February followed by refreshments in the Parish Centre. If you are Catholic and are seriously ill or are elderly and have become notably weakened you may wish to receive this sacrament. You would also be very welcome if you are fit and able but wish to come to pray for the sick and assist them with practical help. Further details will be given to the Parish in the Newsletter about how to get involved in this Mass.

God bless you, Canon David

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<sup>1</sup> John 13: 34-35

<sup>2</sup> Mark 1: 40-41

<sup>3</sup> Pastoral Care of the Sick: General Introduction, paragraph 5.