

5 Sunday A – Communal Anointing of the Sick  
Fr. Val Handwerker

February 5, 2017

Cathedral

5:00 and 10:00

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We heard from the end of the passage from the Letter of St. James: “The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful” (5:16). How much more when all of us as a church community prayer fervently! Shortly, in the name of the church, we shall lay hands on the sick, praying for the Holy Spirit. Then, in the name of the Risen Jesus and going back to the earliest days of the church, *we*—the church—anooint the sick with oil and pray for Jesus’ healing touch.

Last month I had a session with parents who are preparing for the baptism of their infant children. It was a teaching about what baptism means. At the start, we had rounds, during which each couple introduced themselves, and their baby. The first couple told us that their child spent the first nine months of her life in the hospital, gravely ill. But then, the father added, “She’s well now. It was a miracle.”

Later in the session, as we were reflecting on baptism, another couple spoke up. The young father said that, many years ago, when their firstborn was at LeBonheur, Deacon Frank—who had officiated at their marriage—came to the hospital to baptize their critically ill daughter Rylie. The father said that it was the first baptism Deacon Frank had ever done at a hospital. Then the father went further, recounting something which I had forgotten. He said that, when their infant child was not doing well, one day he saw me walking down the hospital hallway, after I had visited the child of another family. He recognized me and called out my name. He said that I could clearly see how distraught he and his wife were at the time, and that I sat down and talked with them. Again I can’t remember that meeting at all, but the father said that in the course of the conversation, I told them how, at different times, I had witnessed healings at that hospital and at St. Jude’s Hospital.

He paused. And then he told the group for the baptism session that, in fact, their daughter did recover fully. He, too, called it a miracle. Now, they were looking forward to the baptism of their second child.

Two different couples at the same session on a Sunday afternoon: both fathers shared with the other couples and me, and both used the word “miracle,” about how their infant children regained their health. That evening I savored what that second father had talked about—a meeting I had forgotten. I gave thanks how the healing grace of Jesus can work in our lives...in our midst now.

Friends: together, we pray as church for the outpouring of the Spirit upon our sick who will soon gather around the altar. We pray for that healing which the Lord desires for each of our sick—whatever sort of healing the Lord chooses for each one. The anointing is not simply a one-day attention to the sick. As church, we are pledged to be a support for all of our sick. We are to be Jesus’ healing touch throughout the year. Again and again, I am gratified how so many within our parish show such faithful care for the sick, day in and day out.

We pray, then, for our sick and their caregivers. We pray for those many in our parish who dedicate themselves to medical service. And we pray that all persons have the same quality health care that many of us have. It has been a longstanding teaching within our Catholic Church that every child, woman and man has the right to proper medical care.

Again and again, in the Gospels Jesus healed the sick. Sisters and brothers: fervently, then, let us pray that the light of his healing presence shine on us this Sunday!

Indeed, **“Blessed be God who heals us in Christ!”**