

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

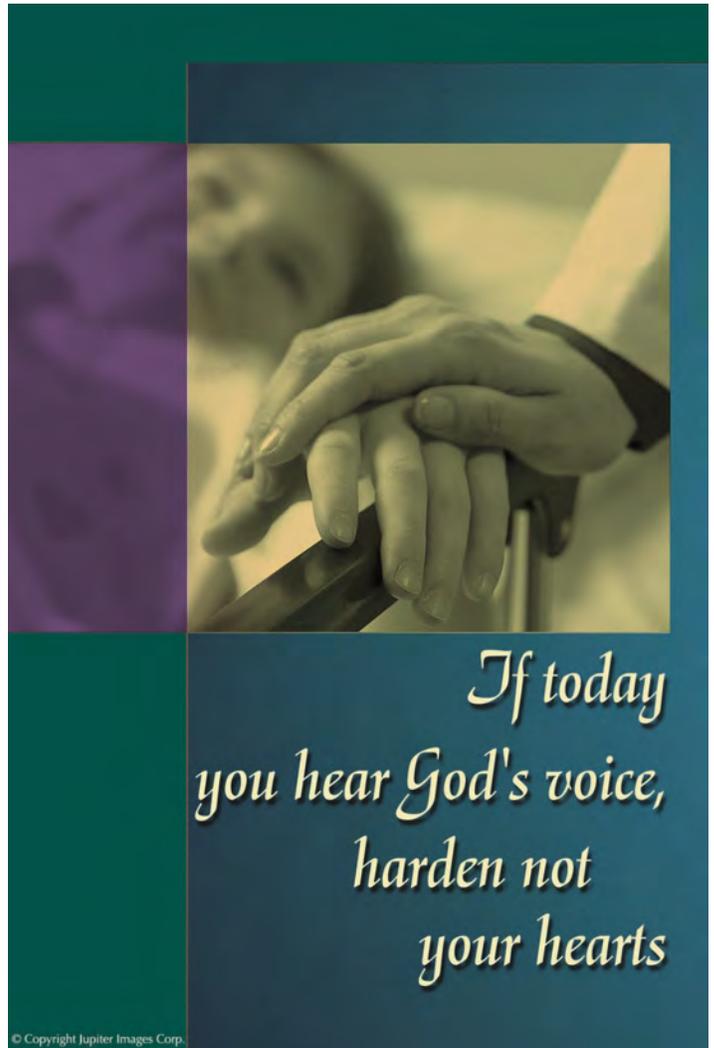
Ministry to the Sick and Dying

Sister Joyce Ann Zimmerman, C.P.P.S.

Jesus came to heal us. There can be no doubt about that. Numerous gospel passages tell how Jesus healed others of their sinfulness as well as of their physical infirmities. Often, after healing someone, Jesus extols their faith. For example, in the well-known parable of the ten lepers, Jesus says to the one who came back to give him thanks, "Get up and go on your way, your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:19). It is no surprise, then, that the Church from the very beginning has continued Jesus' healing ministry, Jesus' care for others, Jesus' compassion for those who need hope and strength. Three rituals in particular continue Jesus' healing ministry.

Many of us older Catholics can remember when what we now call the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick was called "Extreme Unction," pointing to a very, very last anointing. This Sacrament was understood to be only for those immediately in danger of death. The revised understanding of the Sacrament, and the reason for the change in its name, is that anointing of the sick is to be a strength and grace for those suffering from any illness. It is a reminder that the Church does not forget her ailing members. Anyone who is seriously ill may receive this Sacrament, and if the illness changes or worsens, the Sacrament can be received again. It is not good to wait until we are too ill and near death to be able to participate fully in this beautiful anointing. Sometimes the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is celebrated communally in church; sometimes it is celebrated with a single sick person. Either way, Jesus' healing Presence is experienced through the ministry of the Church. While physical healing is not necessarily a given of this Sacrament, spiritual healing and peace surely are.

A second ritual is called Viaticum, a term coming from two Latin words meaning "with the way". This ritual is a special Holy Communion given to someone who is actively dying. Soon the dying person will meet God face to face. Holy Communion is given so



that the individual will be nourished one last time on the Christian journey through death to new and eternal Life. Viaticum is a kind of "comfort food" for the dying. Feasting on the very Body of Christ, the one who is dying is assured that soon one will be united with Christ for all eternity.

A third ritual of the healing ministry of the Church is the Rite of Christian Burial. This ritual unfolds in three distinct moments, connected by two processions. The funeral rites are more than the funeral Mass itself, as important as that is. The Rite of Christian Burial begins with the Vigil, which takes place wherever the body of the deceased person is

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(Ministry to the Sick and Dying Continued)

laid out (most often in a funeral home, but sometimes in church). At some point during the visitation time, while friends and family gather to console those closest to the deceased person, we are familiar with pausing to pray together, often the Rosary. The Church gives us an alternative service called the "Vigil," which consists of songs and psalms, prayers and readings. It can be quite short or a bit longer. This is the ideal time for eulogies, for at the Vigil we are encouraged to express our grief and dependence on God and each other for comfort. The first procession is from the funeral home to the church, where the body is welcomed and the casket is clothed in a white cloth called a "pall" symbolizing

the white baptismal garment. The second ritual moment is the Mass of Resurrection during which we celebrate the risen Life that the deceased person most probably now enjoys. The funeral Mass is about everlasting Life and is intended to move the gathered loved ones beyond grief to the mercy and love of God in bestowing eternal Life. The second procession is to the place of burial, the cemetery, where the grave is blessed and final prayers of farewell are said. The Rite of Christian Burial also provides prayers for immediately after the person has died and for gathering in the presence of the body. In all these rites and prayers, the human remains are afforded great dignity, for when living it was the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. ♦

Vocation Committee

When it comes to building up the church, we all have a part to play, be it fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, other relatives or friends, or a fellow Catholic in the pew. It's not a job that can be left to a few but one that must be embraced by all of us. Start the New Year right; here's another prayer for you to add to your novena of prayers:

Father, in every generation, you provide ministers of Christ and the Church. Give us priests who will lead and guide your holy people, gathered by Word and Sacrament. Bless us with priestly vocations so that we can continue to be a Eucharistic Church, strengthened in our discipline of Jesus Christ, your only Son. Raise up, we pray, priests who are generous in their service, willing to offer their lives and all their gifts for your greater glory and the good of your people. We make our prayer in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**St. James the Apostle
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**2 Powerful Nights
February 8th – 9th
7:00 pm Nightly**

**Fire
In The Desert
Revival**

**Catholic Evangelist
Richard Lane**

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