

LESSON TWENTY-FIFTH.

ON EXTREME UNCTION AND HOLY ORDERS.

“**Unction**” means the anointing or rubbing with oil or ointment. “**Extreme**” means last. Therefore Extreme Unction means the last anointing. It is called the “last” because other unctions or anointings are received before it. We are anointed at Baptism on three parts of the body—on the breast, the back, and the head. We are anointed on the forehead at Confirmation; and when priests are ordained they are anointed on the hands. The last time we are anointed is just before death, and it is therefore very properly called the last anointing, or Extreme Unction. But if the person should not die after being anointed would it still be called Extreme Unction? Yes; because at the time it was given it was thought to be the last. It sometimes happens that persons receive Extreme Unction several times in their lives, because they could receive it every time they were in danger of death by sickness. Suppose a person should die immediately after being anointed in Baptism or Confirmation, would the anointing in Baptism or Confirmation then become Extreme Unction? No. Because Extreme Unction is in itself a separate and distinct sacrament—a special anointing with prayers for the sick. Oil is used in Extreme Unction—as in Confirmation—as a sign of strength; for as the priest applies the holy oil in the sacrament, the grace of the sacrament is taking effect upon the soul. This sacrament was instituted as much for the body as for the soul, as all the prayers said by the priest while administering it indicate. It is given generally after a person has made his confession and received the Viaticum, and when his soul is already in a state of grace; showing that it is in a special way intended for the body. It must be given only in sickness;

for although one might be in danger of death if the danger did not come from within, but from without, he could not be anointed. A soldier in battle, persons being shipwrecked, firemen working at a great fire, etc., could not be anointed, although they are in very great danger of death; because the danger is not from within themselves, but from without. If, however, these persons were so frightened that there was danger of their dying from the fright, they could then be anointed.

271 Q. What is the Sacrament of Extreme Unction?

A. Extreme Unction is the sacrament which, through the anointing and prayer of the priest, gives health and strength to the soul, and sometimes to the body, when we are in danger of death from sickness.

“Anointing.” In this sacrament the priest anoints all our senses,—the eyes, the ears, the nose, the mouth, the hands, and the feet,—and at the same time prays God to forgive the poor sick person all the sins he has committed by any of these. The eyes, by looking at bad objects or pictures; the ears, by listening to bad conversation; the nose, by indulging too much in sensual pleasures; the mouth, by cursing, lying, bad conversation, backbiting, etc.; the hands, by stealing, fighting, or doing sinful things; the feet, by carrying us to do wrong or to bad places. I told you already nearly all our sins are committed for our body, and the senses are the chief instruments. **“Strength to the body,”** if it is for our spiritual welfare. If God foresees, as He foresees all things, that after our sickness we shall lead better lives and do penance for our sins, then He may be pleased to restore us to health, and give us an opportunity of making up for our past faults. But if He foresees that after our sickness we would again lead bad lives, and fall perhaps into greater sins, then He will likely take us when we are prepared, and will not restore us again to health. As He always knows and does what is best for His children, we must in sickness always be resigned to His holy will, and be satisfied with what He sees fit to do with us.

* 272 Q. When should we receive Extreme Unction?

A. We should receive Extreme Unction when we are in danger of death from sickness, or from a wound or accident.

* 273 Q. Should we wait until we are in extreme danger before we receive Extreme Unction?

A. We should not wait until we are in extreme danger before we receive Extreme Unction, but if possible we should receive it whilst we have the use of our senses.

We should always be glad to receive the grace of the sacraments. When, therefore, we are sufficiently ill to be anointed—when there is any danger of death—we should send for the priest at once. If the sick person has any chance of recovering, the sacrament will help him and hasten the recovery; but if the priest is sent for just when the person is in the last agony of death, the person could not recover except by a miracle, and God does not perform miracles for ordinary reasons. If you are in doubt whether the person is sick enough to receive the last sacraments, do not be the judge yourself: send for the priest and let him judge; and then all the responsibility is removed from you in case the person should die without the sacraments. Very often persons are near death, and their relatives do not know it. The priest, like the doctor, has experience in these cases, and can judge of the danger. Again, do not foolishly believe, as some seem to do, that if the priest comes to anoint the sick person it will frighten him by making him think he is going to die. It has never been known that the priest killed any one by coming to see him; and if these same persons who are now sick receive the sacraments in the church from the very same priest, why should they be afraid to receive them from him in their house? And if they are so near death that a little fright would kill them, then they are surely sick enough to receive the sacraments. The sick person who is afraid that Extreme Unction will kill him or hasten his death shows that he has not the proper faith and confidence in God's grace. They who do not wish to receive holy Communion or the Holy Viaticum

in their houses do not want Our Lord to visit them. How ungrateful they are ! When Our Lord was on earth the people carried the sick out into the streets to lay them near Him that He might cure them. Now, He does not require us to do that, but comes Himself to the sick in the most humble manner, and they refuse to receive Him. See how ungrateful, therefore, and how wanting in faith and devotion such persons are ! If the sick person is one who has been careless about his religion, and has for some time neglected to receive the sacraments, do not wait for him to ask for the priest or for his consent to send for him. Few persons ever believe they are so near death as they really are: they are afraid to think of their past lives, and do not like to send for the priest, or at least they put off doing so, frequently till it is too late. The devil tempts them to put off the reception of the sacraments, in hopes that they may die without them, and be his forever. In these cases speak to the sick man quietly and gently, and ask him if he would not like to have the priest come and say a few prayers for his recovery. Do not say anything about the sacraments if you are afraid he will refuse. Simply bring the priest to the sick man, and he will attend to all the rest. Even if the person should refuse—if he has been baptized in the Catholic religion—send for the priest and explain to him the circumstances and dispositions of the sick man. It would be terrible to let such persons die without the sacraments if there is any possibility of their receiving them. Even when they refuse to see the priest it generally happens that after he has once visited them, talked to them, and explained the benefits of the sacraments, they are better pleased than any one else to see him coming again.

Sometimes it is God's goodness that sends sickness to such persons, to bring them back to His worship and the practice of their religion. What does a good father generally do with an unruly child ? He advises and warns it, and when words have no effect, punishes it with the rod, not because he wishes to see it suffer, but for its good, that it may give up its evil habits and become an obedient, loving child. In like manner

God warns sinners by their conscience, by sermons they hear, by accidents or deaths around about them, etc.; and when none of these things have any effect on them, He sends them some affliction—He brings them to a bed of sickness. He punishes them, as it were, with a rod. This He does, not that He may see them suffer, but for their good; that they may understand He is their Master, the only one who can give them health; that all the doctors and all the friends and money in the world could not save them if He determined that they should die. Then they come to know that the world is not their friend; then they see things as they really are, and begin to think of the next world, of eternity, etc. Thus they again turn to God and to the practices of religion. Many persons who reform and begin to lead good lives in sickness would never have changed if God had left them always in good health. But you must not think that all who are sick are so on account of sin. Sometimes very holy persons are in a state of sickness, and then it is sent them that they may bear it patiently, and have great merit before God for their sufferings, and thus become more holy. Again, very small children who have never sinned are sick, and then it is perhaps that their parents may have merit for patiently taking care of them. I say only that God sometimes sends sickness to persons living in sin for the purpose of bringing them back to a better way of living, and in that case their sickness is for them a great mercy from God, who might have allowed them to continue in sin till His judgments and condemnation came suddenly upon them.

274 Q. Which are the effects of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction?

A. The effects of Extreme Unction are: first, to comfort us in the pains of sickness and to strengthen us against temptations; second, to remit venial sins and to cleanse our soul from the remains of sin; third, to restore us to health when God sees fit.

* 275 Q. What do you mean by the remains of sin?

A. By the remains of sin I mean the inclination to

evil and the weakness of the will, which are the result of our sins and which remain after our sins have been forgiven.

“Remains of sin”—that is, chiefly the bad habits we have acquired by sin. If a person does a thing very often, he soon begins to do it very easily, and it becomes, as we say, a habit. So, too, a person who sins very much soon begins to sin easily. This sacrament therefore takes away the ease in sinning, and the desire for past sins acquired by frequently committing them.

* 276 Q. How should we receive the Sacrament of Extreme Unction?

A. We should receive the Sacrament of Extreme Unction in a state of grace and with lively faith and resignation to the will of God.

* 277 Q. Who is the minister of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction?

A. The priest is the minister of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction.

The sacraments that the priest administers in the house are the sacraments for the sick; namely, Penance, Viaticum, or holy Communion, and Extreme Unction. The other sacraments may be administered there in special cases of necessity. You should know what things are to be prepared when the priest comes to administer the sacraments in your house. They are as follows: A small table covered with a clean white cloth, and on it a crucifix and one or two lighted candles in candlesticks; some holy water in a small vessel, with a sprinkler which you can make by tying together a few leaves or small pieces of palm; a glass of clean water, a tablespoon, and a napkin for the sick person to hold under the chin while receiving; also a piece of white cotton wadding, if the priest should ask for it.

Then you may have ready in another place near at hand some water, a towel, and a piece of bread or lemon for purifying the priest's fingers; but these things are not always necessary: still, it would be better to have them ready in

case the priest should require them, so as not to keep him waiting. Every good Catholic family should have all these things put away carefully in the house. It would be well, though it is not necessary, to keep a special spoon, napkin, etc., for that purpose alone. Sometimes persons are taken ill very suddenly in the night, and when the priest comes they have none of the things they should have; and if their neighbors are as careless as themselves, they will not have them either: so the priest is delayed in giving the sacraments, or is obliged to administer them in a way that is almost disrespectful to Our Lord. If we would make such preparations for the coming of a friend to our house, why should we be so careless when Our Lord comes? If a friend comes when we are not prepared to receive him, we feel very much ashamed, and make a thousand excuses for our want of thought. Therefore provide the things necessary for the administration of these sacraments in your house, and keep them though they may be seldom if ever required in your family.

When Our Lord comes to visit your house receive Him with all possible respect and reverence. Some good Catholics have the very praiseworthy practice of meeting the priest at the door with a lighted candle when he carries the Blessed Sacrament, and of going before him to the sick-room. This can be done where there is only one family living in the house, or at least in the apartment. All who can do this should do it, because it is in keeping with the wish of the Church. In olden times, and even now in Catholic countries, the priest brings the Blessed Sacrament in procession to the sick. He goes vested as for Benediction, accompanied by altar-boys with lighted candles and bells. The people kneel by the way as Our Lord passes. Our Lord is carried in procession always in the church on the feast of Corpus Christi, on Holy Thursday, and during the Devotion of Forty Hours. The Church would like to have this solemn procession in honor of Our Lord every time the Blessed Sacrament is brought from one place to another. But this cannot always be done in the streets, because there are many persons not Catholics who would insult Our Lord while passing along;

and in order to prevent this, the priest brings the Blessed Sacrament to the dying without any outward display. But we should always remember the very great respect due to Our Lord, and do all we can to show it when possible.

278 Q. What is the Sacrament of Holy Orders?

A. Holy Orders is a sacrament by which bishops, priests, and other ministers of the Church are ordained and receive the power and grace to perform their sacred duties.

“Other ministers,” means deacons and subdeacons, properly so-called. When a young man goes to study for the priesthood—after he has discovered that God has called him to that sacred office—he passes several years in learning what is necessary, and in fitting himself for his sacred duties. After some time he receives what is called Tonsure; that is, on the day of ordination the bishop cuts a little hair from five places on his head, to show that this young man is giving himself up to God. The tonsure is a mark of the clerical state, and in Catholic countries it is made manifest by keeping a small circular spot on the crown of the head shaved perfectly clean. It reminds the cleric or priest of having dedicated himself to God, and also of the crown of thorns worn by Our Blessed Saviour. For this last reason some of the holy monks shaved all the hair from their head, with the exception of a little ring, which resembles very much a wreath or crown of hair encircling the head. You often see them thus represented in holy pictures.

After the young student has received the tonsure and studied for a longer time, he receives the four Minor Orders, by which he is permitted to touch the sacred vessels of the altar, and do certain things about the church which laymen have not the right to do, especially to serve Mass. After more preparation he becomes a subdeacon, and then he may wear vestments and assist the celebrant at Solemn Mass. At a Solemn Mass there are three priests in vestments. The priest standing on the platform of the altar and celebrating Mass is called the celebrant; the one who stands just behind

him, generally one step lower, is called the deacon, and the one who stands behind the deacon and on the lowest step is called the subdeacon. The one who directs the whole ceremony, and gives signs to the others when to stand, sit down, or kneel, is called the Master of Ceremonies.

When speaking of the Mass, I forgot to tell you something about the different kinds of Masses—that is, different as far as the ceremonies are concerned, for they are all alike in value. First we have the Low Mass, such as the priest says every day and at the early hours on Sundays. It is called low, because there is no display in ceremony about it. Next we have the High Mass—called *Missa Cantata* (sung)—at which the priest and choir sing in turn. Lastly, we have the Solemn High Mass, at which we have three ministers or priests, and singing by both ministers and choir, as well as all the ceremonies prescribed by the Church. When any of these Masses are said in black vestments they are called Requiem Masses, because the priest offers them for the rest or happy repose of the soul of some dead person or persons, and the word *requiem* means *rest*. *Vespers* is a portion of the Divine Office of the Church. It is sung generally on Sunday afternoon or evening in the church, and is usually followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. It is not a mortal sin to stay from Vespers on Sundays, even wilfully, because there is no law of the Church obliging you to attend. Nevertheless all good Catholics will attend Vespers when possible.

To continue about the ministers of the Church: When the subdeacon is ordained a deacon, he can wear still more of the priestly vestments, and also baptize solemnly, preach, and give holy Communion. After a time the deacon is ordained a priest, and receives power to celebrate Mass and forgive sins. If afterwards the priest should be selected by the Holy Father to be a bishop, he is consecrated; and then he has power to administer Confirmation and Holy Orders, ordaining priests and consecrating bishops. Thus you see there are grades through which the ministers of the Church must pass. First the tonsure, then Minor Orders, then subdeaconship, then deaconship, then priesthood. Nuns, Sisters, Brothers.

etc., are not, as some might think, ministers of the Church, because they have never received any of the Holy Orders.

The ordained ministers of the Church can perform the duties of any office for which they have ever been ordained, but not the duties of any office above that to which they have been ordained. For example, a sub-deacon cannot take the place of a deacon at Mass, nor a deacon the place of a priest; but a priest may take either of their places, because he has, at one time, been ordained to both these offices.

Altar-boys should never forget that they are enjoying a very great privilege in being allowed to take the place of an ordained minister of the Church, and serve Mass without being ordained acolytes.

In olden times princes and noblemen used to seek for this wonderful favor, and count themselves happy if they secured it. Think of it! To stand so near our blessed Lord that they are able to see His sacred body resting upon the altar, and to offer the wine, which a few minutes later is changed into His very blood!

*** 279 Q.** What is necessary to receive Holy Orders worthily?

A. To receive Holy Orders worthily it is necessary to be in the state of grace, to have the necessary knowledge, and a divine call to this sacred office.

“Knowledge”—that is, to be able to learn and to have learned all that a priest should know.

“Divine call,” explained before in the explanation of vocation, a word that means call. (See Lesson Sixth, Q. 51.)

*** 280 Q.** How should Christians look upon the priests of the Church?

A. Christians should look upon the priests of the Church as the messengers of God and the dispensers of His mysteries.

“Messengers.” Our Lord said to His apostles: “As the Father sent Me, I also send you.” That is, as the heavenly Father sent His Beloved Son, Our Lord, into the world to

save men's souls, so Our Lord sends His apostles and their successors through the world to save souls. God told the priests of the Old Law that if they did not warn the people of coming dangers they would be held responsible for the people; but if they warned the people and the people did not heed, then the people would be responsible for their own destruction. So, too, in the New Law the priests warn you against sin, and if you do not heed the warning the loss of your soul will be upon yourself. Therefore you should take every warning coming from the ministers of God as you would from Himself, for it is really God that warns you against sin, and the priests are only His agents or instruments. "**Dispensers**"—that is, those who administer the sacraments.

*** 281 Q. Who can confer the Sacrament of Holy Orders?**

A. Bishops can confer the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

"**Confer**"—that is, give or administer. So can a cardinal, if he be a bishop, and so can the Holy Father, who is always a bishop, and called bishop of Rome, while Pope of the whole Church. It will be well here to give some explanation about cardinals—who they are, and what they do. In the United States the President has about him seven or eight prominent men selected by himself, and called his Cabinet. They are his advisers; he consults them on all important matters, and assigns to them various duties. The Holy Father, who is also a ruler—a spiritual ruler—not of one country, but of the whole world, has also a Cabinet, but it is not called by that name: it is called the Sacred College of Cardinals. There are seventy cardinals, to whom the Pope assigns various works in helping him to govern the Church. Some of these cardinals are in different parts of the world; as our own Cardinal Gibbons here in America. There are cardinals in England, France, Germany, Canada, Spain, etc., but a certain number always remain in Rome with the Holy Father. When a bishop or priest is made cardinal he is raised in dignity in the Church, but he does not receive any greater spiritual power than he had when only a bishop or priest. The cardinals,

owing to their high dignity, have many privileges which bishops have not. Their greatest privilege is to take part in the election of a new Pope when the reigning Pope dies.

The Pope dresses in white, the cardinals in red, the bishops in purple, and the priests and other ministers in black. A "Monsignor" is also a title of dignity granted by our Holy Father to some worthy priests. It gives them certain privileges, and the right to wear purple like a bishop. The "Vicar-General" is one who is appointed by the bishop in the diocese, and shares his power. In the bishop's absence he acts as bishop in all temporal and worldly matters, and also in some spiritual things, concerning the diocese. A diocese is the extent of country over which a bishop is appointed to rule, as a parish is the extent over which a pastor is appointed to administer the sacraments and rule under the direction of the bishop. Pastors are also called rectors. Pastor means a shepherd, and rector means a ruler; and as all pastors rule their flocks, pastor and rector mean about the same.

An archbishop is higher than a bishop, though he has no more spiritual power than a bishop. The district over which an archbishop rules contains several dioceses with their bishops, and is called an ecclesiastical province. The bishops in the province are called suffragan bishops, because subject in some things to the authority of the archbishop, who is also called the metropolitan, because bishop of a metropolis or chief city of the province over which he presides.

The archbishop can wear the pallium, a garment worn by the Pope, and sent by him to patriarchs, primates, and archbishops. It is a band of white wool, worn over the shoulders and around the neck after the manner of a stole. It has two strings of the same material and four black or purple crosses worked upon it. It is the symbol of the plenitude of pastoral jurisdiction conferred by the Holy See. Morally speaking, it reminds the wearer how the good shepherd seeks the lost sheep and brings it home upon his shoulders, and how the loving pastor of souls should seek those spiritually lost and bring them back to the Church, the true fold of Christ.