

## **A Scriptural Defence for the View that both Penance and the Sacrament of the Sick are Sacraments of Healing**

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### **Introduction**

John 20:22-23 points to the Institution the Sacrament of penance, 'receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive sin of any they are forgiven and if you retain they are retained. It is therefore, a remedy to those who, after baptism have delivered themselves to the bondage of sin. Anointing of the Sick on the other hand (Mark 6:13), promulgated by Apostle James that the sick are to be presented to the elders of the Church, prayed over and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of the faith will save the sick person and the Lord will forgive the person (James 5:14-15). This article shall use the Scriptural texts to defend the view that both Penance and Sacrament of the sick are sacraments of healing.

### **Nature of the Sacrament of the Penance and Anointing of the Sick**

Penance is a sacrament in which by the virtue of the sin committed after baptism is forgiven by the absolution of the priest. It makes the sinner reject sin, confess and amend one's life in the future hence, suggest conversion or therapy. O'Neils states that, penance is responsible for justification, the transit of person from the state of sin to friendship with God based on grace (O, Neil, 278). Hence, it restores and heals the member of Christ to grace after personal sin for which he now has sorrow. Sometimes it is called Reconciliation because, after the confession an individual feels satisfied and love God who forgives (2 Cor 5:20). The confession of the sins and forgiveness one receives, are related to the reconciliation with God, the Church, in the home, neighbourhood and the whole world hence healing.

On the other hand, Anointing of the sick is a sacrament of the living and not of the dead. The sick are anointed with oil by the priest, then prayers follows. This sacrament strengthens, heals and comforts the soul of an individual. It also remits sin and restores health when God sees it necessary. This sacrament offers a sort of spiritual antidote to the demanding effects of illness. This brings the spiritual healing through the comforting grace of the sacrament. Jesus went on healing the sick in his ministry. He heals the man tormented with evil and anointing of the sick.

## **Sacrament of Penance and of the Sick as Sacraments of Healing**

### **The sacrament of Penance**

Martos in his book, *Doors to the Sacred* talks of Jesus as a sacrament of divine forgiveness to many who had encountered him in his ministry. He talks of (Mark 1:15) as Jesus beginning his ministry with a call to repentance. To those who show sorrow for their sinfulness, he announced that they were forgiven by the power of God (Luke 5:18-26). Christ visited the sinners who were rejected by the society saying that He has been sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 7:24), at the same time He spoke of the love of the Father even to those who have strayed away from God. Hence, penance brings reconciliation and healing to the people thereby restoring broken relationship with God (Martos, 314).

From the beginning, man had always known the alienation we call sin. Man yearns to be healed from sin and be made whole again. Jesus made the theme of his ministry, as Salvation. His name Jesus is a translation of the word Saviour. For he shall save his people from sins (Matthew, 1:2). His mission was, repent and believe in Good News (Mark 1:15). He told stories about the prodigal son- the merciful Father and the forgiveness of sins. Luke 24:47, talks of penance for the remission of sins to be preached to all nations (Bausch, 154).

The Acts of the Apostles (19:18), shows how Christians in Ephesus confessed their sins. Some of them had done wrong by dabbling in magic. To express their sorrow, they confessed their sins and burnt their books as a way for seeking healing and reconciliation with God. They realized that that the prayer and forgiveness of the Church are important of being brought back to God. James tells us (5:16) that people should confess their sins to enhance healing within themselves and to God. John in 1:8-9 talks of being aware of our sins that destroy our relationship with God. It is God who cleanses us from all evil (Duffy, 9).

Sacraments are outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace. The outward sign of this sacrament is contrition for sins. Sacraments has matter and form. In penance, the matter is sorrow for the sin. The form is how the church deals with the matter that is confession to the priest that brings healing to the penitent. Matthew (16:18-19) present the confession of Peter. Jesus asked his disciples who people say He is. Simon Peter responded that, 'Christ the Messiah, the Son of the living God'. Jesus then made Peter the rock. He is given the keys for kingdom of heaven in which whatever he binds on earth are bound in heaven and whatever he loosened on earth is loosened in heaven (Bausch, 154).

Matthew (18:18), the context of the previous verse suggest that, 'to bind and to lose' mean that the community has the authority to condemn and to acquit in such a case but where these actions are seen as part of the process of bringing the sinful brother to his senses. In John 20:21-24, he told his disciples that, if they forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them. And if they retain the sins of any, thy have been retained.

The sacrament of penance can also be seen in the context of conversion from sin and turning to God. Luke 22:54-62 and John 21:15-19 present Peter weeping bitterly over triple denial of Christ but he later received

the grace of conversation and confessed love for Jesus. Paul too was converted from persecuting Christians to become one of the greatest disciple of Christ (Acts 9:1-31). Therefore, sin hams our relationship with God and damages our communion with the Church. Conversion is the beginning of healing and getting back to God.

Haring talks of the warning Paul is giving us that the chief source of perversion and misery in human relations is the lack of gratitude to God. Refusal to honour God and to render Him thanks, futile thinking and the misguided mind is plunged into darkness as seen in Romans (1:21-22). The new liturgy of the sacrament of penance directs the celebration of thanksgiving and praise that marks divine milieu that prevails peace and joy hence healthy relationships, we continue to carry on the healing power of the sacrament of Penance ( Haring, 182).

### **The Sacrament of Anointing the Sick**

Martos comments that, the disciples of Jesus shared in his ministry of healing. The Gospel recounts that He had sent them out into the country side to cure the sick and preach the good news of the Kingdome (Luke 9:1-6). In Mark (6:12-13), the disciples are sent to preach metanoia . The followers of Jesus were casting out, anointing and were healing, as if it was usual thing for them. In the Greek text, we are told that anointing was done with oil and in this case, the olive oil. In the ancient times, the use of oil for healing was common. Healing is regarded as a gentle art hence, we can use our gifts to help people with physical or spiritual illness. Therefore, Mark describes the activities of the disciples as preaching and healing and this reflects the words in Mark (1:14-15), the common mission of Jesus (Martos, 371).

The scripture teaches us that Jesus forgave sins and restored the health of those he encountered during his ministry. On his way to Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:21-43), he healed the woman with an issues of blood and commended her faith. He raised the Jairus's daughter from the

dead. He healed those whom he encountered who were sick. He also commanded his apostles to heal the sick (Matthew 10:8).

The book of James (5:15), talks of the effect of the sacrament of anointing the sick. This include properties of oil and prayer (James 5:14-16). Mark 6:13 mentions that the disciples anointed many sick people with oil and cured them (Martos, 371).The prayer of the faith will save the sick person and the Lord will raise that person up. If he or she has committed sin, he or she will be forgiven. This implies that, the grace of the Holy Spirit, whose anointing takes away the sins. This sacrament, comforts and strengthens the soul of the sick person. It also awakens in him or her confidence in the divine mercy. With this, the sick person bears more lightly the trials of their illness and resists more easily the temptations of the devil.

Bausch says that, this sacrament as written in Mark (6:13), is commended to the faithful and promulgated by Apostle James. It talks of the sick person being called by the elders of the Church who will in turn pray for her or him, and being anointed with the oil in the name of the Lord, James (5:14-15). Afterwards, the prayer of the faith will save the person and the Lord will raise that person up and if he or she had committed any sin, he or she will be forgiven (Bausch, 205).

Moreover, in the Gospel of Mark (6:7-113), Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits. So they went off and preached repentance. They drove out many demons and they anointed them with oil, many who were sick and cured them. In the Acts of the Apostles as Tobin puts it, the Apostles in many occasions were empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that they healed the sick Acts 2:43, 3:1-10. The opening quote in the article of James, traditionally used as the scriptural foundation of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, suggest that the recipient of the sacrament of anointing could he healed both spiritually and physically (Tobin, 2)

Furthermore, in Mark, Jesus sent his disciples two by two to preach repentance and acceptance of the Gospel. Jesus gave them a share in his powers and with that, Mark adds that, they went off preaching the need of repentance; that all evil ( including sickness) are part of network of sin. They expelled many demons, anointed the sick with oil and work many cures (Mark 6:11). This presents the ministry of healing as related to sin, repentance and faith that would be the essence of the sacrament of anointing the sick (Bausch, 204)

However, Duffy points out that, Jesus is presented as always compassionate to those who were ill. At the beginning of his working life as presented in Matthew (11:4-6) he sent the disciples of John the Baptist to tell John that, the blind can see again, the lame can walk, those suffering from ultra-skin-disease are cleansed, the deaf can hear. When He called his first disciples, he gave them authority to heal diseases and illness of every kind (Matthew 10:1). After he was raised from the dead, he told his disciples that those who are sick would recover from illness after his disciples had laid their hands on them and prayed over them Mark 16:18 (Duffy, 22).

## **Conclusion**

Therefore, as we have already discussed above, the Sacrament of Penance reminds us that we are human. As humans we are not perfect. We always tend to do well but sometimes fail. Through sacrament of penance Christians experience a healing of their moral illness, at the same time they give sign of faith in loving God and healing relationship between them and God. The reconciliation with God brings a healing within the heart of a Christian hence an encounter with the love of God within us.

The Catholic Church has always been faithful to the instruction of St. James that is, anyone who is ill should be sent to the elders of the

Church and they must anoint the sick with the oil in the name of the Lord and pray for him ( 5:14-15). It had also been known as ‘extreme unction’ but in the recent days emphasis is on the healing of the living and their illnesses. Anointing brings spiritual healing as well as physical healing to the believers. Hence, sacrament of Anointing of the sick and penance are sacraments of healing.

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