

The Basics of Orthodoxy Class 102

St. Gregory of Nyssa Orthodox Church, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Topic 8: Holy Unction - anointing with oil for healing

(from the Orthodox priest's prayer book "The Book of Needs")

An Apostolic practice—directly given to the Apostles by Christ:

Matthew 10:5-8

5 These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ 8 **Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely** you have received, **freely** give.

Mark 6:12-13

“So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and **anointed with oil** many who were sick, and **healed them.**”

Who gave the Apostles this **Oil of Healing**? Who blessed it? Obviously, **Christ**.

The Early Church **continued** this practice:

James 5:13-16

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 14 **Is anyone among you sick?** Let him call for the elders [*presbyters*] of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of **faith** will **save the sick**, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be **forgiven**. 16 **Confess** your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Prayer by presbyters, faith, confession of sins, and the holy unction oil all combine with God's Grace to bring about the healing of soul and body for the infirm person.

Typically, traditionally, **seven priests** gather together around the sick person to pray the Sacrament (Mystery) of Holy Unction. The normal **preparation** for Holy Unction by the sick

person is to make a **sincere confession of sins**, as indicated in James 5:16. Also, if possible, the next steps of preparation for Holy Unction is the **partaking of the Mystery of Holy Communion**. The priest (presbyter) will bring the Reserved Sacrament (Holy Communion which is always kept in a holy container on every Orthodox church altar table for emergency situations). After communing, then will follow the **special service of Holy Unction**. (To speed things up, especially in life-and-death emergencies, an Orthodox priest will carry with him a small bottle of already-blessed Unction anointing oil. However, if it is possible, and there is sufficient time, it is better to pray the entire service, with seven priests, or with as many as can be gathered.)

The Orthodox Service of Holy Unction, from the priest's prayer book: *The Book of Needs* ("Trebnik")

1st Reading

Prokeimenon, Tone 1

Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, just as we hope in You.

Vs. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright!

Epistle: James 5:10-16 [already cited above]

Alleluia, Tone 8

I will sing of mercy and judgment, to You, O Lord.

Gospel: Luke 10:25-37 **The Good Samaritan Parable**

[*excerpt*]...33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 **So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.** 35 On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'...

"Oil" is Holy Unction. "Wine" is the Holy Communion. The "Inn" is the Church".

2nd Reading

Prokeimenon, Tone 2

The Lord is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation.

Vs. The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death.

Epistle: Romans 15:1-7

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. 3 For even

Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.” 4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. 5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, 6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

Alleluia, Tone 5

I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever.

Gospel: Luke 19:1-10 **The Story of Zacchaeus**, who experienced inner spiritual healing when Christ visited him personally in his home.

[*excerpt*]...5 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today **I must stay at your house.**” 6 So he made haste and came down, **and received Him joyfully.** 7 But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.” 8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, **I give half of my goods to the poor;** and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, **I restore fourfold.**” 9 And Jesus said to him, “**Today salvation has come to this house,** because he also is a son of Abraham; 10 for the Son of Man **has come to seek and to save that which was lost.**”

3rd Reading

Prokeimenon, Tone 3

The Lord is my light and my Savior; whom shall I fear?

Vs. The Lord is the Defender of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:7

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then **gifts of healings**, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? **Are all workers of miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healings?** Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 4 **Love suffers long and is kind;** love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Alleluia, Tone 2

In You, O Lord, I put my trust; let me never be ashamed.

Gospel: Matthew 10:1, 5-8

And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease...5 These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ 8 **Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.**

4th Reading

Prokeimenon, Tone 4

In the day that I call, answer me speedily.

Vs. Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come to You.

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:16-17:1

16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “**I will dwell in them and walk among them.** I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” 17 Therefore “**Come out from among them and be separate,** says the Lord. **Do not touch what is unclean,** and I will receive you.” 18 “I will be a **Father** to you, and **you shall be My sons and daughters,** says the Lord Almighty.” 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Alleluia, Tone 2

I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me.

Gospel: Matthew 8:14-23

[*excerpt*] 14 Now when Jesus had come into Peter’s house, He saw his wife’s mother lying sick with a fever. 15 So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them. 16 When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He **cast out the spirits** with a word, and **healed all who were sick,** 17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: “**He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.**”...

5th Reading

Prokeimenon, Tone 5

You shall keep us, O Lord, You shall preserve us from this generation forever.

Vs. Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases!

Epistle: 2 Corinth. 1:8-11

8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 **Who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in Whom we trust that He will still deliver us,** 11 you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.

Alleluia, Tone 5

I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever.

Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13 **The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins**

Explanation: The Wise Virgins made sure that they had sufficient oil, while the Foolish were careless and did not have enough oil and thus were not ready to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. “Oil” in this case refers to the Grace of the Presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, which alone **heals one’s soul** and prepares it for eternal life.

6th Reading

Prokeimenon, Tone 6

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness.

Vs. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Epistle: Galatians 5:22-6:2

22 But the **fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control.** Against such there is no law. 24 And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Alleluia, Tone 6

Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments.

Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28 **A Gentile Canaanite Woman Shows Her Great Faith**

21 Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.”

23 But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she cries out after us.”

24 But He answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” 25 Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, help me!”

26 But He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.”

27 And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

28 Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O **woman, great is your faith!** Let it be to you as you desire.” And **her daughter was healed from that very hour.**

7th Reading***Prokeimenon***, Tone 7

O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure.

Vs. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak.

Epistle: 1 Thess. 5:14-23

14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. 15 See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies. 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.

23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you **completely**; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be **preserved blameless** at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Alleluia, Tone 7

May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob defend you.

Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13

9 As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “Follow Me.” So he arose and followed Him.

10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

12 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are **sick**. 13 But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but **sinners, to repentance**.”

Holy Unction is one of the **seven main Mysteries** (Sacraments) of the Church to this day. People are still healed—in soul and/or body—when approaching this Holy Mystery with faith in God.

However, healing is not restricted to usage of Holy Unction—many **cures** are associated with **relics** (2 Kings 13:20-21), with **touching holy garments** (Luke 8:43-48), by touching a blessed **handkerchief**—called “**secondary relics**” (Acts 19:11-12), with a **command** and a touch of a **hand** (Acts 3:6-8 and Acts 5:12), and even by the **touch of the shadow** of the Apostle Peter (Acts 5:14-16). Healing can come via Holy Water (John 5:4 and Ezekiel 36:25). Even **holy myrrh** that streams **miraculously** from **certain icons and the relics** of saints is used by God for

healing. Also, **oil from lampadas** which hang in front of certain icons and tombs of saints, **when applied with faith, can bring healing**. Healing can come when the Lord, His Mother, or a saint **visit you in a dream or vision**. Healing can also simply come because **you pray in sincere faith: “Ask and you shall receive”** (Matt. 7:7) All of the above require faith.

The power to heal can be a “Gift of the Holy Spirit” given permanently to certain individuals in the Church. See I Corinthians 12:28

28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, **then gifts of healings**, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

An entire host of holy men who had the gift of healing are commemorated in the Church. They are remembered and named in the prayers for Holy Unction.

“Through the prayers...of the holy and unmercenary Physicians:

Cosmas & Damian

Cyrus & John

Panteleimon & Hermalaeus,

Sampson & Diomedes,

Photius & Anicetus

These are doctor **saints** who had **the gift of healing**, and who cured using both medicines and prayer [**quite often with prayer alone**] and who were “unmercenary” in that they freely gave to others the Grace that they had themselves received freely from God—never charging anyone money.