

EXTREME UNCTION

In the list of sacraments conferred by anointing extreme unction is the last. It is likewise the anointing for the last moments of life. Hence, we call it the last anointing or **Extreme Unction**. It is not extreme in the sense that we must be in extreme danger to receive it, nor that once we have received it we have no chance of recovery. This sacrament is intended by Christ as a health restorer for the soul; it frees from venial sin, increases sanctifying grace, removes the remains of weakness and sin in the soul, removes the temporal punishment due to offenses, gives the soul strength and courage to face the last Temptations in the death struggle, and enter eternity ready for heaven. In some cases it even removes mortal sin as we shall explain.

Any Catholic who is dangerously sick, old people in danger of death though not violently ill, those who have met with serious accident, those about to undergo an operation that places them in danger of death, women in precarious condition on account of childbirth, all these may and must receive **Extreme Unction** even though death is not certain or even if there is greater probability in favor of recovery. **Extreme Unction** must be received in the state of grace so confession or at least perfect contrition must precede it. However, if anyone is suddenly overtaken by sickness and is unconscious when the priest arrives, he may still receive the sacrament. In such a case the absolution of the priest is of doubtful value because there has been no confession, but **Extreme Unction** certainly removes all mortal sin, and confers sanctifying grace provided the sick person has at least *imperfect contrition* in his heart. In such cases it gives much greater certainty of freeing from sin than the absolution of the priest. If the sick person though conscious when receiving the sacrament, has some *unforgiven mortal sin* on his conscience of which he is ignorant, it will be remitted. He need have no more than *imperfect contrition*.

In order that the sacrament have its fullest effect it must be received in time so that the patient can himself, by Acts of Faith, Hope, Love and Contrition cooperate with the graces conferred. Then there is greater reason to hope for bodily recovery and if deaths should follow, the agony will be more easily endured, purgatory will be shorter and a more glorious crown in heaven will be assured. How often may extreme unction be received? Once in the same sickness. If the sick person has successfully gone through one crisis and is out of danger and again relapses, though it be from the same sickness he may receive at the sacrament again. Let the priest judge the situation.

