

ALL SAINTS WEST DULWICH

The Sacrament of Healing and Wholeness



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Healing and wholeness were central to the ministry of Jesus. The Gospels have many instances in which he cures those who are sick and restores them to a full and healthy life. However, these individual acts of healing must be understood within a wider context: of a radical new and trusting relationship with God.

For us today, three points must be clearly grasped. First, in one way or another we are all wounded, and in need of healing. The Sacrament of Healing and Wholeness is offered for those who experience anxiety or distress, as well as for those who are physically ill. We each have a range of physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health challenges. This sacrament meets these complex and often interlocking needs. Second, the sacrament does not guarantee a 'miracle cure'. The main expectation is that it will deepen our relationship with God, deepening trust and building resilience. Third, the sacrament resists the idea that we are totally autonomous individuals. In receiving it, we benefit from the touch of others. Given the many forms of community we experience – in church and beyond – we may also want to come forward in prayer for another person, or indeed for the needs of the world.

What are we praying for when we ask God for healing?

In the Sacrament of Healing and Wholeness, we pray that we may experience the transforming power and presence of Christ. We also pray that our society, and our churches, may be healed from the dis-ease of seeing those with physical illnesses, problems and challenges as somehow imperfect and inferior. Jesus reminds us that even when we are sick, broken, or struggling, we are of infinite value as people made in the image of God.

The laying on of hands and the anointing restore our innate dignity in Christ. In the touch of human hands, Christ himself touches us,

through the ministry of the wider community of the Church. In that touch, we are reminded of God's loving presence and solidarity, and our solidarity with one another. In the anointing, God seals us with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit infuses us with love, renews our confidence and faith in God, and strengthens us against discouragement and despair. We receive the anointing on our forehead and hands as a sign that we offer all we are to God:

- Strengthened to face our suffering with courage
- Able to receive Christ's forgiveness of the dis-ease of our human frailty
- Restored to health, in whatever way God desires
- United to Christ's suffering and death
- Prepared for our own death, and for the fullness of Christ's risen life

What do the gospels teach us about healing?

The cures of the Gospel stories are not simply 'miracles'. We often read them as the 'cure' of an individual. But they are also signs of the Kingdom of God. Jesus healed others, but he also endured suffering and embraced death. As we share in the ministry of healing in this parish, we hold together these two aspects of Jesus' life. No matter what our needs, or the needs of the world, or what course our illnesses may take, Christ shares in our suffering.

The gospel stories of healing are intimately related to the restitution of social value (Mark 1:44; 5:15-20; 6:32-34, Luke 13:10-17). Jesus restores the human dignity of the person and brings those who are sick back into the community. At the same time, he challenges the norms of their communities: highlighting how groups and whole societies may also be ill. In this respect, injustice and exclusion are a kind of sickness.

Further biblical references: Matthew 10:8; Mark 6:13; Luke 10:8-9; the Letter of James (James 5: 14-15).

The Sacrament of Healing and Wholeness in the parish

On one Sunday a month the Sacrament of Healing and Wholeness will be available during holy communion. After receiving communion, if we wish to receive this ministry, we are invited to go to the place where the sacrament is administered. There are usually two people there: a lay person and a priest. We will normally receive the sacrament in two parts:

- **The laying on of hands with prayer**

This can be from a lay or ordained person. Generally, we hope to have lay people share in this ministry. It is a very simple, straightforward and moving act.

Laying hands on our head, the person prays very simply for our wholeness, healing and peace.

- **The anointing with oil**

This part of the ministry of healing is only performed by a priest. After the laying of hands, we are invited to move to the priest with the oil. We hold out our hands as a sign that we offer ourselves fully to God. The priest then makes the sign of the cross on our foreheads and then on our palms, saying:

**'I anoint you in the name of God who gives you life.
Receive Christ's forgiveness, healing and love.'**

- **Lighting a candle in prayer**

Although not formally a part of the Sacrament of Healing and Wholeness, many people find it helpful and meaningful to light a candle after receiving this ministry.

This is an amended version of a leaflet which was originally produced in the parish of St Clement Notting Dale and St James Norlands by the Rev'd Robert Thompson, who generously agreed to its use.