

Introduction

**Our commitment to the Catholic social mission
must be rooted in and strengthened by our spiritual lives.
In our relationship with God we experience
the conversion of heart that is necessary
to truly love one another as God has loved us. ¹**

The *Leader's Guide to Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, published by the United States Catholic Conference in 2000, reminds us that : “The key is to look at the social meaning of symbols and texts, not just at their personal meanings. Given our individualistic culture, this is a challenge.”

One of the graces in the liturgical movement coming out of the Second Vatican Council was to see more clearly the communal character of the sacraments. The sacraments are a celebration of the community—not something that is normally done in private. They are a celebration for the nourishment of the community. It is in the renewal of the communal aspect of our sacramental life, that we find a powerful challenge to our social life and the possibility to receive the grace to put our faith into practice more powerfully.

**In a global culture driven by excessive individualism, our tradition
proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. . . .
The Catholic tradition teaches that human beings grow and
achieve fulfillment in community. . . .
While public debate in our nation is often divided between those
who focus on personal responsibility and those who focus on social
responsibilities, our tradition insists that both are necessary.²**

A Pre-note: Do not force your justice concerns into the liturgy. One does not need to do violence to the liturgy in order to acknowledge our social teaching or in order to be empowered into action on behalf of justice. A healthy celebration of the sacraments supports social ministry. Our sacraments are meant to be communal celebrations and to empower us into action. The following reflections are not an invitation to make every sacramental celebration into a rally against the death penalty or a reflection on the moral issues around world trade and globalization or a spelling out of right to life issues or a call for an increase in the minimum wage. Rather, these thoughts are presented to promote awareness—an awareness of the social values imbedded in our liturgical practice when it is at its best—an awareness of the larger implications that flow from the story of Jesus and the living practice of Christ among us. Our desire is to nurture awareness, not a political ideology. As Jesus says: “The truth will set you free.”

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*, 1998, <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/contents.htm>

² Ibid.



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Liturgical Practice	Comment	Connection to Catholic Social Teaching	Implications
Communal Celebration	Although it is not always possible, it is especially powerful to celebrate this sacrament in the presence of a community. It is most powerful to have family and friends praying together with the person who is sick.	Illness, disability, poverty, cultural differences should not separate us from the presence of God.	Many parishes also have an annual communal celebration at a Eucharist and make a special invitation to bring together those who might be homebound or find it hard to get to church regularly.
Anointing with Oil	Anointing is the special sign of healing and renewal.	Our Social Teaching challenges us to work for healing of mind and body and also relationships.	The sacrament reminds us that the whole human community needs to be healed.
Touch	In our culture, many people are afraid of touch or misuse the power of touch in inappropriate ways.	Our sacramental practice challenges us to “touch” each other in a profound way – in a way that reflects social change and healing.	We are called not to be afraid of those who are sick, disabled, poor, or in any way in need.
Words of Prayer	“Through this holy anointing, may God help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the God who frees you from sin, save you and raise you to eternal life.”	In a culture of rugged individualism the words remind us that we are not alone. In a society with lots of medical resources, the words remind us that we need more than ourselves and machines to come to true healing.	Ultimately, the sacrament leads to a certain liberation or freedom, even in the midst of the limits of our bodies and health.

People are called to joy. Nevertheless, each day they experience many forms of suffering and pain. The Synod Fathers, in addressing men and women affected by these various forms of suffering and pain, used the following words in their final Message: “you who are the abandoned and pushed to the edges of our consumer society; you who are sick, people with disabilities, the poor and hungry, migrants and prisoners, refugees, unemployed, abandoned children and all you who are the abandoned and pushed to the edges of our consumer society; you who are sick, people with disabilities, the poor and hungry, migrants and prisoners, refugees, unemployed, abandoned children and people who feel alone; you who are victims of war and all kinds of violence; the Church reminds you that she shares your suffering. She takes it to the Lord, who in turn associates you with his redeeming Passion. You are brought to life in the light of his resurrection. We need you to teach the whole world what love is. We will do everything we can so that you may find your rightful place in the Church and in society.”¹

As I wrote in the Encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, solidarity “is not a feeling of vague compassion or who allow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all.”²

¹Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 1988, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html

²Ibid.

Questions for Reflection

How has this study guide expanded your ideas about the implications of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick?

Brainstorm ways in which you can creatively weave Catholic Social Teaching into your parish’s understanding of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.