

En Theos

Enthusiasm for the Faith

Q *Must you receive the anointing of the sick to get to heaven?*

A At conferences on spirituality and healing in medicine, doctors are reporting the positive effects of faith and prayer on healing and wellness through studies and personal observation. The clinical studies can measure the effects of what is happening. What they cannot measure is God's grace, which comes to us in many ways to heal, sanctify and comfort. The essential sacrament of "healing" is baptism, which frees us from the grasp of death through a birth to eternal life. This is what ultimately heals us in the sense that sin can no longer harm us or destroy us.

The anointing of the sick is not necessary for one to get to heaven. In fact, many Catholics never receive it. But it does channel God's healing grace to us in a special way to help us in our moments of weakness. It protects us from despair and offers the consolation of God's loving providence through the prayers of the church and the ministry of the priest. That is a power beyond measuring!

The anointing of the sick is a sacrament for the sick, with a prayer for healing, not a sacrament for those close to death (that's viaticum—Communion "on the way"). If you're chronically ill, anticipating surgery, or in a hospital or nursing home, ask your parish priest for this healing grace.

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