



a Kendall Hunt Company

## Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



### Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

1 Kings 19:9, 11-13

Psalm 85:9, 10, 11-12, 13-14

Romans 9:1-5

Matthew 14:22-33

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

RCL Benziger  
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Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

### The Word In Liturgy

Scholars assign the third part of the Book of Isaiah, called Trito-Isaiah, to the period of restoration after the return from exile in Babylon. The post-exilic era was a time in which the prophetic voice was raised up both to exhort the Jewish people to fidelity to God's covenant and to expand their horizons to the universal proportions of the divine call. The Israelites were in constant danger of falling into a suffocating self-importance based on their sense of themselves as God's chosen people. Anti-pagan polemic was a stock feature of the rhetoric designed to shore up fidelity to the covenant. But earlier prophets had also counseled

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compassion for the strangers and aliens as one way of overcoming harsh and discriminatory attitudes toward the Gentiles in their midst. By the time of Trito-Isaiah, the chosen people were ready for the shocking suggestion that God's offer of salvation might even include pagans. This passage is one of the strongest statements of that universalism in the Jewish scriptures. However, it is still clear that the pagans, too, would be held to the high ethical and moral standards of the covenant ("Observe what is right; do what is just," v. 1). Henceforth, all generations of Israel would have to grapple with a prophetic word that foretold a day when God's holy temple in Jerusalem would be "a house of prayer for all peoples" (v. 7) and when God's salvation would be known "among all nations" (v. 2).

Today's gospel reading provides yet another insight into the universality of God's offer of salvation. Matthew has reworked his Marcan material (Mark 7:24-30) in several ways that reflect the situation of his own community. He calls the woman a Canaanite, a category of people still despised by his Jewish-Christian community. There is no mention in this account of the children of Israel being fed first; rather, Jesus holds up the woman's faith as reason for her healing. Clearly, this event signals the inauguration of a new era, a new covenant of grace based on faith in Jesus rather than adherence to the Torah. The generation of believers to whom Matthew wrote apparently still struggled, as had their ancestors, with the full implications of a prophetic word that offered salvation indiscriminately to all. The act of healing in the gospels is always a sign that the messianic era has been inaugurated in the person of Jesus. Our suggested doctrinal focus today on the sacrament of anointing can be enriched with this broad understanding of God's healing activity, revealed in the person of Jesus, as a ministry that is offered to all people as a sign of the advent of God's reign. The universalism of Trito-Isaiah was an eschatological reality, only anticipated in prayerful hope; the healing of the Canaanite woman proclaims that the era of the Messiah has finally dawned in Jesus. The continuing experience of healing in the Church of Matthew's generation (and ours) reflects an awareness that we are the messianic community, charged throughout history with making God's universal offer of salvation a reality in every dimension of human existence.

## **Catholic Doctrine**

### ***Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick***

As is clear from this Sunday's gospel, Jesus is sent by a loving God to be a healer for all those  
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struck down by sickness and ill health. Indeed, Jesus extols the woman in the gospel for her—faith in him, a faith that promotes wellness and healing.

The Catholic Church does not believe that sickness is a punishment from God, for the Son of God has made our pain his own (Matthew 8:17 and Isaiah 53:4). The Lamb of God, sacrificed for us, takes away the sin of the world. Thus, by the mystery of his own suffering and death, Jesus gives new meaning to our own illness and suffering whose earthly reality is transformed by the Lord. Those who are sick—and indeed all those who are healthy—can look upon the cross of Christ and know that humanity in its limitations and sickness has been configured and united to the Lord of life who is the Redeemer (CCC 1505).

Consequently, the Church supports by prayer and presence persons who are sick and invites them to faith in Jesus—in spite of the burdens and doubts occasioned by sickness. The Second Vatican Council outlined what the major thrust of this sacrament should be. They (referring to James 5:14–16; Romans 8:17; Colossians 1:24; Timothy 2:11–12; 1 Peter 4:13) declared, “By the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of the priests the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord that he may raise them up and save them. And indeed she exhorts them to contribute to the good of the People of God by freely uniting themselves to the passion and death of Christ (LG 11).

The wisdom of the Council acknowledged the existential reality involved in serious sickness. This debilitating experience is a certain reminder of our human frailty, limitation and ultimate mortality, and pending despair. On the other hand, supported by the care and concern of family, friends, and the Church, a person who is sick can find an opportunity to renew and strengthen their faith in the God who will not abandon us and who has, in Jesus, suffered indignities, pain, and torture unto death.

From the earliest times, the Church has attested to an anointing for those who are sick. This prayerful action has been considered a sacrament (James 5:14–15). Bishops and priests pray over, lay hands upon, and anoint those who are sick with holy oil. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, this anointing of the sick was celebrated for only those who were perceived to be in immediate danger of death. The Council taught that this sacrament was not only for those who were in immediate danger of death but any who experienced the difficulty of physical or

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mental sickness, debilitation, or old age (SC 73).

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The Church understands and upholds that through the celebration of this sacrament persons who are sick are strengthened through the grace of God and given peace and courage. In other words, "In this context, the sick themselves, as well as all those who participate in their sickness as social process, are . . . invited by the very nature of the act to surrender in remembrance and thanksgiving . . . they are challenged and supported by the worshipping community to entrust themselves to God in hope, in faith and in love" (NDictSacr 1170). As Catholics, we believe that suffering and sickness, through the witness of the Church to the gospel, can acquire a transforming power. It is for this reason that this sacrament should always be preceded by the Word of God (except in an emergency) and be celebrated communally, with the sick person surrounded by family, friends, and other believers. Even if the sacrament is celebrated by a priest alone with the person who is sick, the communion of saints, the whole household of the faith, is present in prayer, consoling, reaching out, touching with this ritual action.



The Church prays in this sacrament for those who are sick, "Father in heaven, through this holy anointing grant N. comfort in her suffering. When she is afraid, give her courage, when afflicted, give her patience, when dejected, afford her hope, and when alone, assure her of the support of your holy people" (PC 125).