

## Anointing of the Sick Homily

A redacted version originally given by Father Francis Mitchell

When I was thinking about you coming here today, and when I was thinking of all those who are ill, I was struck by the story we see in picture form on the walls of every church, the Stations of the Cross, and I was struck by how similar that story is to your story.

When somebody is ill or feeling unwell for any reason, isn't it as if a heavy cross has been placed on their shoulder? These people certainly occupy the Second Station: Jesus receives his cross. And despite all the people who are around and the great medical care that is available and the different treatments and x-rays and so on, isn't it true that when the cross of illness lies on your shoulder it's up to you to carry it forward? And you'll have moments when you feel well capable of carrying it and you hardly notice its weight at all, but you will also have other moments when it digs into your flesh and every time a muscle moves you feel the pain even to the point of falling under the weight of it: the Third Station: Jesus falls the first time; the Seventh Station: Jesus falls the second time; the Ninth Station: Jesus falls the third time. It's easy to fall down under the burden of worry or pain or the fear of treatment or fear of the future, and it would be easy to give up, but we don't. Human nature being what it is, we want to get back up and try to move forward just as Jesus did after each fall.

Along the way there are people who are really concerned for us, people who love us and they would prefer to be sick themselves rather than having to watch us being ill, and the greatest pain they feel is the pain of helplessness – there's nothing they can do. How better to describe this than as the Fourth Station: Jesus meets his Mother? There are people everywhere who understand very well what Our Lady suffered as she met her Son that day, they understand perfectly what it was like – but maybe they never realized it before, maybe they never put it into words before. It's a difficult "Station" for the people who love someone who is ill.

Of course there are others who do whatever they can to ease the burden: the Fifth Station: Simon helps Jesus to carry his cross; the Sixth Station: Veronica wipes Jesus' face. The carer in your home, a member of your family, the kind neighbor, the priest's or sister's visit, the Home Health Nurse, and so on, all bring these particular Stations to life in our time.

Occasionally people who are feeling unwell and those who are getting old say things like: "I'm only in the way, I'm only a burden." They don't seem to be able to see the huge amount of good they continue to do. The answer to this is captured in the Eighth Station: Jesus consoles the women of Jerusalem. The person who is sick continues to pray maybe even better than they ever prayed before, they give hope to others who are in a similar situation – with a similar illness or going through similar treatment, for example. They give great witness and example to younger people who may not have these difficulties today but who may have to face them at some stage in the future.

So you see, the person who is ill can read the story of their lives in the pictures we call "The Stations of the Cross." There we notice that Jesus is indeed very close to those who have been asked to carry the cross of illness. There we see how close he is to you really, how intimately close to you he is in your suffering, but in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, which we are about to celebrate now, the Church invites you to experience, to feel in a tangible way, how close he is to you. When the priest anoints you on the forehead and on the hands with the holy oil, remember it is Jesus himself who lays his healing hand on you, and the results – even if we don't see them with the human eye – are always miraculous!