

The Protection of the Mother of God Parish
51 Prospect Street, Nyack, NY 10960
is hosting

The Sacrament of Holy Unction

on **PALM SUNDAY + April 28th..... at 4:00 PM**

His Eminence, Metropolitan Nicholas will be officiating.

Приход Покрова Пресвятой Богородицы в Найаке,
пригласил нас присоединиться на

Таинство Елеосвященія (Соборованіе)

Вербное воскресенье + 28-го апреля..... в 16:00

Будет возглавлять службу –

Его Высокопреосвященство, Митрополит Николай

Unction is a most important sacrament,
one that everyone should make a point to participate in!

Please look below to learn how to prepare..... A more detailed email will soon follow

Елеосвящение – самое важное таинство, тот,
в котором каждый должен принять участие!

Чтобы узнать, как подготовиться, пожалуйста, смотрите ниже..... более подробная и-мэйл вскоре последует



more information for Holy Unction - April 28th
Follow the guidelines, and contact Fr. Dimitri with any questions,
or to schedule Confession

...информация о Елеосвящении –
(Соборованіе) 28-го апреля
Посмотрите ниже....

Соблюдайте правила подготовки -
а по любым вопросам обращайтесь к отцу Димитрию,
или договориться на исповедь.

The Sacrament of Holy Unction.

Metropolitan Hilarion's Guidelines for:

The Sacrament of Holy Unction

- 1. One should not be late for the beginning of the Sacrament of Holy Unction;**
- 2. Only Orthodox Christians may receive Unction;**
- 3. Children younger than 7 are NOT anointed;**
- 4. Women undergoing menstruation MAY receive Holy Unction.**
- 5. Women may not wear any cosmetics;**
- 6a. One should come to the Sacrament dressed with an open collar;**
- 6b. Women should cover their heads;**
- 7. The Holy Unction oil should NOT be given out after the service;**
- 8. Each person should be holding a candle from the beginning of the Sacrament, until the anointing.**
- 9. Each person should have gone to Confession on the same day, or just a couple of days before Holy Unction.**

Таинство Елеосвященія (Соборованіе)

1. Слѣдуетъ не опаздывать къ началу Таинства Елеосвященія;
2. Собороваться могутъ только православные христіане;
3. Дѣти младше 7и лѣтъ НЕ соборуются;
4. Женщины въ періодъ мѣсячнаго очищенія **МОГУТЪ** приступить къ Таинству Соборованія;
5. Женщинамъ нельзя пользоваться косметикой;
6. На Таинство всѣмъ слѣдуетъ приходить въ одеждѣ съ открытымъ воротникомъ, женщинамъ – съ покрытой головой;
7. Святое масло послѣ Соборованія раздавать НЕ положено;
8. Къ началу Таинства всѣмъ необходимо имѣть въ рукахъ свѣчу.
9. Исповедоваться передъ соборованіемъ необходимо каждому.

***Holy Unction** is a sacrament that, by blessing the believer's body with sanctified oil, calls down upon us God's grace, healing one's physical and spiritual infirmities. The sacrament of "anointing with oil" was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Matt. 10:1; Mark 6:13).*

In addition to the Holy Apostle James, Origen and the Holy Hierarchs Irenaeus of Lyons, Basil the Great, and John Chrysostom all attest to its existence in the Early Church (indeed, they are the authors of the prayers read during the performing of the Sacrament).

Елеосвящение (Соборование) – это Таинство, въ которомъ, при помазаніи больного освященнымъ елеемъ (масломъ), призывается на больного Божественная благодать для исцѣленія его отъ тѣлесныхъ и душевныхъ недуговъ.

“Таинство св. Елея” учреждено Самимъ Господомъ нашимъ Иисусомъ Христомъ

(Мате. 10:1; Мк. 6:13).

О существованіи его въ древней Церкви, кромѣ апостола Іакова свидѣтельствуютъ Оригенъ и святители Иринея Ліонскій, Василій Великій и Іоаннъ Златоустъ (ими и составлены молитвы, читаемыя при совершеніи Таинства).

**I found the following articles - some are rather long-
but well worth the read!!**

*Я нашел следующие статьи в Интернете,
некоторые из них довольно длинные.... но стоит прочитать!!*

на русском - смотрите тут:

<http://hramtroitsy.ru/podgotovka-k-tainstvam/pravilnaja-podgotovka-k-soborovaniju/>

или смотрите тут:

<https://www.pravmir.ru/soborovanie-kak-gde-kogda-i-dlya-chego/>

The first.... from St. John the Baptist Cathedral in Washington, DC.

Елеосвящение

Елеосвящение есть таинство, в котором иерей или епископ, при помазании больного освященным елеем, испрашивает для него, вместе с Церковью, благодать Божию, исцеляющую его душевные и телесные немощи.

Во время Своей земной жизни Господь Иисус Христос воскрешал мертвых, изгонял бесов, исцелял больных, возрождал омраченные грехом души, свидетелствуя тем самым о совершенстве Божественной Любви и подавая пример сострадания. Посылая Своих учеников на проповедь, Господь им прямо заповедывал исцелять больных (Мф. 10,1), при этом Апостолы мазали больных маслом (Мк. 6,13) и, впоследствии, так научили поступать верующих по всем Церквам. Апостол Иаков передает это повеление в следующих словах:

«Болен ли кто из вас, пусть призовет пресвитеров Церкви, и пусть помолятся над ним, помазавши его елеем во имя Господне. И молитва веры исцелит болящего, и восставит его Господь; и если он соделал грехи, простятся ему» (Иак. 5,14-15).

Таинство елеосвящения совершается во исполнение этих святых заветов. Кроме телесного исцеления в таинстве испрашивается отпущение грехов, так как большинство болезней является следствием греха, а самый грех есть болезнь духа. Многие Учители Церкви поясняют, что в таинстве елеосвящения отпускаются преимущественно забытые грехи.

Таинство елеосвящения положено совершать семи иереям, чем показывается, что забота о больных и сострадание есть дело всей Церкви. Самое число семь есть символический знак Церкви и ее полноты. По этой причине самое помазание больного и молитвы об отпущении его грехов и исцелении повторяются семь раз. А также читаются семь различных отрывков из Апостола и семь — из Евангелия; в них повествуется о покаянии, об исцелении, о необходимости верить и уповать на Бога, а также быть сострадательным и милосердным.

Внимающие Слову Божию при совершении таинства елеосвящения приводятся к сознанию, что помощь страдающему есть путь и собственного спасения. Иерей помазует различные части лица, грудь и руки болящего при словах молитвы: «Отче Святыи, Врач душ и телес,.. исцели раба Твоего (имя) от одержащей его телесной и душевной немощи, и оживотвори его благодатию Христа Твоего».

В заключении таинства на голову больного священник полагает раскрытое святое Евангелие, буквами вниз, и читает разрешительную молитву.

Таинство елеосвящения по нужде может быть совершено меньшим числом иереев, и даже только одним. Церковь знает неисчислимое множество случаев скорых, а иногда мгновенных исцелений болящих силою этого таинства. Если же больной умирает, православные верят, что, посредством таинства елея, он обретает особую благодатную помощь для страшного перехода в иной мир. Тем не менее, это таинство ни в коем случае не является, как многие думают, таинством напутствия к смерти. Нет, это, прежде всего, таинство исцеления больных и участия Церкви в сострадательной любви к страждущему своему члену.

В русской Церкви установился обычай совершать на Страстной седмице это таинство и над здоровыми в храме, потому что все нуждаются в прощении забытых грехов и никто не может считать себя по настоящему здоровым.

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY UNCTION

Jesus gave His apostles the same power He had to heal diseases. We read in Luke 9:1-2, "... He gave them power and authority over all demons, with the power to heal diseases. And he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. . ." We read in Mark 6:13 that the apostles "anointed many sick persons with oil, and healed them."

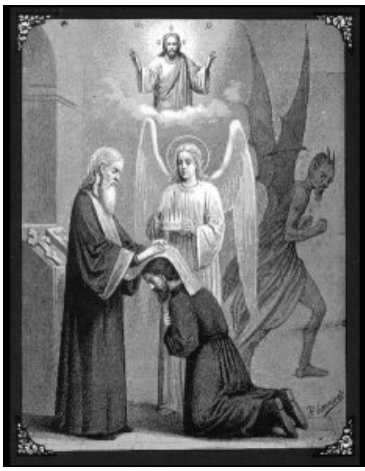
From the beginning the apostles used the power Jesus had given them over sickness. They anointed the sick with oil to heal the body and forgive sins. We read in James 5:12-15:

"Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."

Holy Unction is one of the sacraments of the Church through which the healing power of Jesus is mediated to us today. The visible sign of Unction is oil.

Always used for healing in the ancient world, the oil is blessed by the Holy Spirit to bring us God's healing grace. As we come to be anointed with this consecrated oil, we bring with us our "prayer of faith", i.e., a living, personal faith that when we are anointed with this oil, the hand of Christ will touch us with His healing power. God speaks to us through the fourteen Scripture readings that are part of this Sacrament (seven Epistle and seven Gospel readings). He speaks to increase our faith in His power to heal. The fact that the presence of seven priests is recommended (but not required) for the celebration of this sacrament gives expression to our faith that the whole Church is present and praying for the sick person together with relatives and friends.

Through the Sacrament of Holy Unction, every Church becomes a healing shrine pervaded by the prayers of the clergy and the faithful, and hallowed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Here we find our faith fortified and sustained as we grow in grace and understanding. Here we find the power and the presence of the Healing Christ.



During Holy Week when we are reminded how much God suffered on the cross to save our souls, we are reminded that God cares for our bodies also. This is why on Holy Wednesday evening every year the Greek Orthodox Church celebrates this Sacrament of healing. She invites us to come forth with faith to be touched by God's love through this sacrament of healing.

"The prayer of faith will save the sick," writes St. James. God's saving of the sick may include healing but not in every case. God does not always promise healing, but, if faith is exercised, God does always promise salvation. Sickness is often used by God to create faith and to strengthen it. Sickness may lead to panic and despair, but it can also lead to faith. And if, through sickness, one is led to faith, then that faith leads to the saving of the person.

Speaking on this aspect of Unction, Fr. John Meyendorff writes: "Healing is requested only in a framework of repentance and spiritual salvation, and not as an end in itself. Whatever the outcome of the disease, the anointing symbolized divine pardon and liberation from the vicious cycle of sin, suffering and death, in which fallen humanity is held captive. Compassionate to human suffering, assembled together to pray for its suffering member, the Church through its presbyters asks for relief, forgiveness, and eternal freedom. This is the meaning of holy unction."

The Sacrament of Anointing is a sacrament for the body. Many pagans looked upon the body as

something evil. They considered it a prison in which the soul was kept a prisoner. Their whole philosophy of salvation centered in helping the soul free itself from the chains of the body through extreme fasting and self-mortification.

Christianity, on the other hand, looked upon the body not as a PRISON but as a TEMPLE OF GOD. "Know ye not that your body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit," writes St. Paul.

The body is destined not for the earth: "dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return;" it is destined for heaven. When we see Christ ascending into heaven with His physical body, we see humanity – ourselves – ascending there with Him. The body that dies is buried in a grave, but only temporarily. One day God will resurrect the body and re-unite it with the soul so that both soul and body may spend eternity together.

The Sacrament of Anointing is thus an expression of God's love for the body which He created and has destined for eternity.

Unction should remind us that as members of Christ's Church we are members of a healing fellowship. We are healed in order to bring healing to others. We are forgiven in order to bring forgiveness to others. We are loved in order to love others. We are blessed in order to be a blessing to others. We are to be channels of God's healing in the world.

Like the Good Samaritan, we should never hesitate to stop on the road of life to pour the healing oil of God's love and forgiveness on our neighbor lying neglected and abandoned by the roadside. If the Church is the Body of Christ, then that kind of healing should be happening all the time. Whoever touches the Church, even in a tenuous way, should discover that he has touched the source of healing. For, the healing that is given us through Unction and prayer is given to us for the sake of all our neighbors in the world.

Holy Unction or Holy Anointing, is one the Seven Mysteries of the Church, which is celebrated in a church or in the home to cure illnesses of the body and the soul. The Unction of Holy Wednesday does not have a magical effect on our spiritual life, but it is part of an unbreakable chain together with the other Mysteries in which we must participate, namely, Confession and Holy Communion.

The Origins of the Mystery

The origins of Anointing, as that of the other Mysteries, is found in the New Testament, specifically the Epistle of Saint James (5:14-15): "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the presbyters of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."

Thus, the apostolic order is the basis on which is founded the faith and ritual acts of the Church. Those who perform this philanthropical Mystery are the presbyters of the Church, who pray fervently and invoke the grace of the All-Holy Spirit to bless the oil which is distributed. Then the Faithful are anointed with the blessed oil.

The Celebration of the Mystery

The Service of Anointing is performed for "the healing of soul and body". According to the teaching of the Church, physical illness is regarded as a bitter fruit of sin. Any sickness as a disorder of the harmonious functioning of the body is due to spiritual causes, mainly a disruption of man's relationship with God. In the sacred texts there is not only a close association of the sickness with sin, but at the same time it indicates a way of therapy: sincere repentance and return to God.

The Visible Elements of Anointing

For the celebration of the Mystery there is placed on a table a Holy Gospel, an icon of Christ, a lit oil lamp, a bowl full of wheat, in which are placed seven candles. The oil lamp should be clean and inside should be pure oil, to indicate a pure and sincere offering to God. This is why the Good Samaritan in the homonymous parable, is lovingly nursed of his injurious wounds with olive oil and wine. The oil, after the prayers of the clergy, is no longer common oil. The same with baptism: the baptismal water, after the prayers of the liturgist, is no longer common water.

At the end of the service is the anointing with the holy oil. We are anointed cruciformly on the forehead, eyes, nostrils, lips, both ears, chest and in the palm and outside of each hand. With this anointing, the priest asks the Lord for the healing of spirit, thought and our entire inner world. Furthermore, that it give strength to the members of the body with which we make the most use.

The Importance of the Holy Mysteries of Repentance/Confession and Unction.

Those may not understand that Confession and Holy Unction are Biblical Mysteries/Sacraments and confession of sins was called for even in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament.

The Mystery of Penance/Confession

The Book of Numbers 5:6-7a "Speak to the children of Israel, saying, "When a man or woman commits one of the sins that human commit, and actually disregards a neighbor, that soul has committed a trespass. Then he shall confess openly the sin he committed..."

The Book of Nehemiah 9:2-3 "Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God, and they were confessing to the Lord and worshipping the Lord their God."

The Book of Baruch 1:13-14 "Pray for us too the Lord our God, because we have sinned against the Lord our God. Even to this day the wrath of the Lord and His anger is not turned away from us. And you shall read this book which we are sending you, in order to make a confession in the house of the Lord on the feast days and on the solemn days."

The Gospel According to Saint Matthew 3:5-6 "Then Jerusalem, and all of Judea, and all the country round about the Jordan were going out to him, and were being baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins."

The Gospel According to Saint Mark "And all the land of Judea, and all of Jerusalem, were going by out to him; and all were being baptized in the Jordan River by him, confessing their sins."

The gift of God's forgiveness is received through private prayer, corporate worship, the disciplines of prayer and fasting, penitential services and above all through the sacrament of Holy Confession.

The value of Holy Confession is twofold. First, through this sacramental act of the ordained presbyter/priest and the Christian believer we have the assurance of divine forgiveness, according to the words of Christ:

The Gospel According to Saint John 20:22-23 *“And after He said this, he breathed on them, and saith to them, “Receive ye the Holy Spirit: if ye forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven too them; if ye retain the sins of any, they are retained.””*

Secondly, Holy Confession provides the opportunity to talk about one's deep concerns, to receive counsel and to be encouraged toward spiritual growth, all of which are universally recognized as extremely beneficial to personal life.

Remember that you are confessing to God. The presbyter is there as a witness, and help you not fall back into that sin. You should really be repentant and be willing to change your mind/way as this is what *mentanoia* means. After confession, the presbyter may give you an *epitimion/penance*, which may consist of prayers or spiritual reading to help you not fall in to this sin again and realize the seriousness of your sin.

Holy Confession is appropriate at anytime. It is recommended to participate in the Sacrament of Confession on a regular basis. The Apostolic Canons state that if we do not Commune every three weeks, we have excommunicated ourselves from the God's Holy Church. Confession is an essential part of our total spiritual preparation during the fasting periods leading up to the great feasts of Pascha/Easter, Nativity/Christmas, Dormition, and the Feast of Twelve Apostles, and on, or near, our Saint's Day. Also, Holy Confession is especially necessary:

1. when a serious sin has been committed;
2. when a habitual sin has overwhelmed a Christian, or
3. **when a Christian has stopped growing spiritually and needs a reexamination of priorities.**

We confess our sins to God and the power of forgiveness is God's. However, the gift of God's forgiveness, although assured, is not magical. It does not automatically spare us from spiritual struggle - the continual vigilance against evil and the unceasing warfare against sin. Holy Confession will bear fruits in the Spirit only when the believer hates evil, utterly rejects sin and patiently cultivates positive habits of the life in Christ:

The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans 6:11-13 *“Thus reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore let us not sin be reigning in your mortal body, so that ye obey it in its desires. Cease presenting your members as weapons of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as weapons of righteousness to God.”*

How can one prepare for Holy Confession? Consult with your Confessor, your Priest. Preparation for Holy Confession is a prayerful examination of feelings, thoughts, words, acts, attitudes, habits, values, priorities, goals, direction, and way of life. This prayerful self-examination includes not only the personal religious life, but also family relationships, social activities, job conduct, business dealings, political commitments and even recreational pursuits, because our entire existence should be lived in under the light of the Holy Spirit is not to condemn ourselves, but to affirm our true selves in Christ who has given us access to God's mercy and forgiveness and who has taught us to live for God's glory.

Pray and think and your confession over several days. Ask God to help you perceive your sins and to make a thorough confession of them. Sometime before the sacrament of Holy Confession, pray **Psalm 50(51) & 51(52)**.

Now, without justification or self-pity, make a prayerful examination of your conscience regarding all things. As a help, again, consult the priest, and, if need be, take pencil and paper and specify your sins so that, at the time of the sacrament, you will be able to make a thorough confession from the list, without confusion or lapse of memory.

Remember that the presbyter/priest is there as God's ordained witness, not as a judge, and that there should be no fear in approaching the Mystery.

The Mystery of Holy Unction

The General Epistle of Saint Iakovos (James) 5:14-16 *“Is anyone among you infirm? Let him call the presbyters for the Church; and let them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the one who is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he be one who hath committed sins, it shall be forgiven him. Keep on confessing your transgressions to one another and praying for one another, that ye might be healed. The entreaty of a righteous man hath much strength when it is energized.”*

So Saint Iakovos/James describes the anointing of the sick, providing the apostolic foundations for the sacrament of unction, or more properly, "the oil of prayer" (*euchelaion*). In keeping with the biblical injunction, the Orthodox order for the celebration of this sacrament calls for a group of presbyters to be present at it but this requirement is only of secondary importance. Nor is it required that the person receiving the sacrament be mortally ill as some have supposed. Bodily healing as well as the forgiveness of sins are the primary purposes of this sacrament and only in cases of imminent death can it be considered a preparation for it.

Orthodox theology has always stressed the unity of body and soul and this means that there can be no sharp dichotomy between physical and spiritual; the readings and prayers used in the rite of unction certainly do not assume that physical healing is assured framework of repentance. The anointing symbolizes ultimate pardon in the face of sickness and even death, physical results of the spiritual disease of sinfulness. Unction itself has frequently been associated with penance as a single action and in some instances it has even superseded penance. The popular public celebrations of unction on Holy Wednesday in many Orthodox churches might be incorrectly interpreted as a substitute for actual confessions of sins by individuals in preparation for the pascal Eucharist. Needless to say, anointing is meaningless without true contrition.



The Sacraments

Holy Unction From the OCA:

Christ came to the world to “bear the infirmities” of men. One of the signs of his divine messiahship was to heal the sick. The power of healing remains in the Church since Christ himself remains in the Church through the Holy Spirit.

The sacrament of the unction of the sick is the Church's specific prayer for healing. If the faith of the believers is strong enough, and if it is the will of God, there is every reason to believe that the Lord can heal those who are diseased.

Is any among you sick, let him call for the presbyters of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed (Jas 5:14-16; see also Mk 6:13).

The sacrament of anointing is a “sobornal” sacrament in the traditional Orthodox practice. This means that as many of the faithful as possible are gathered to participate in the prayers. The rite itself calls for seven priests, seven readings from the epistles and gospels, seven prayers and seven anointings with oil specifically blessed for the service. Although it is not always possible to perform the sacrament in this way, the normal procedure is still to gather together as many priests and people as possible.

The express purpose of the sacrament of holy unction is healing and forgiveness. Since it is not always the will of God that there should be physical healing, the prayer of Christ that God’s will be done always remains as the proper context of the sacrament. In addition, it is the clear intention of the sacrament that through the anointing of the sick body the sufferings of the person should be sanctified and united to the sufferings of Christ. In this way, the wounds of the flesh are consecrated, and strength is given that the suffering of the diseased person may not be unto the death of his soul, but for eternal salvation in the resurrection and life of the Kingdom of God.

It is indeed the case that death inevitably comes to man. All must die, even those who in this life are given a reprieve through healing in order to have more time on the earth. Thus, the healing of the sick is not itself a final goal, but is merely “instrumental” in that it is given by God as a sign of his mercy and as a grace for the further opportunity of man to live for him and for others in the life of this world.

In the case where a person is obviously in the final moments of his earthly life, the Church has special prayers for the “separation of soul and body.” Thus, it is clear that the sacrament of holy unction is for the sick—both the physically and mentally sick—and is not reserved for the moment of death. The sacrament of unction is not the “last rites” as is sometimes thought; the ritual of the anointing itself in no way indicates that it should be administered merely in “extreme” cases. Holy unction is the sacrament of the spiritual, physical, and mental healing of a sick person whatever the nature or the gravity of the illness may be.

The Service of Holy Unction

(By Fr. Paul Wesche - Apr 15, 2009)

Holy Unction is a sacrament, and so it is given only to the faithful, to those who have been received into the Orthodox Church through confession, baptism and chrismation, and who, we should add, have themselves received the faith of the Orthodox Church through the sacrament of confession. Holy Unction is a sacrament of healing; as the priest says when he applies the unction, “The child of God is anointed unto the healing of soul and body.”

Now, we know that God’s goodness shines on the just and the unjust; that he heals even those who do not worship him. He healed, for example, even the nine lepers who did not return to him in Eucharist, in gratitude, but went their own way. Last September, I was privileged to venerate the relics of King St Stephan of Kosovo at Visoki Decani monastery when I visited the Balkans. The abbot of the monastery told us that both Muslims and Christians come to venerate the relics of King St Stephan, and that both Muslims and Christians report healing from the saint. So, we know that the grace of God is poured out on all, whether Christian or not. Why, then, is Holy Unction, since it, too, is a sacrament of healing, not given freely to all? Why is it given only to the faithful? I’m not sure I can answer that, but the question drives us to consider the meaning of the sacrament, so that even if we can’t answer that particular question to everyone’s satisfaction, at least it will serve the purpose of leading us into a reflection that deepens our appreciation of the sacrament.

In the Church, oil is used not only for the sacrament of Holy Unction but also for the sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation, which are the sacraments of initiation when one is united to a death like Christ’s and so also to a resurrection like his. This tells us at once that as a sacrament, Holy Unction is received, as is the Holy Eucharist, in the sacramental life of the Church, which is the life of the crucified and risen Lord. It is received, then, by those who have crucified themselves with Christ and who have died to the world: i.e., to the lusts and pleasures of the flesh and to the pride of this worldly life. As a sacrament, then, Holy Unction is received not on *this* side of the grave – which for the one who has confessed Jesus Christ is the baptismal font – it is received not in the life of this world, but on the other side of the grave, in the life of the risen Lord into which those are born who through the sacrament of baptism have been clothed with the robe of light, the wedding garment, and who through the sacrament of Chrismation have received the life of the Spirit who is in the Lord Jesus, the Word of God, and which is the Light of the Lord that enlightens everyone who comes into the world of the Spirit – as the holy fathers teach us who comment on this passage from St. John’s Gospel.

Note that this sacramental life of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual life of the risen Lord, is given to those who *receive* it. To receive the risen life of the Lord, one must believe in the Lord; but to believe in the Lord means to follow the Lord. That means to practice his commandments to repent – i.e., to turn one’s mind away from the wisdom of one’s own opinions in order to receive instruction from the Wisdom of God that is the Lord Jesus himself – and to take up one’s cross in order to follow Christ. In the sacramental structure of the Church, we take up our cross pre-eminently through the sacrament of confession. Before one is allowed to approach the baptismal font or is received into the Church from some other christian religion through chrismation, one is brought to the confession. It is through the sacrament of confession that everyone who comes into the Church makes oneself ready to receive the life of Christ through the sacraments of baptism and chrismation.

In the sacrament of confession, we do three things: i) we confess the holy Orthodox Faith that has been given to us by the holy apostles on the foundation of the prophets, whose chief cornerstone is Christ Jesus, God the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us; ii) we give thanks to God for his great goodness and his great love out of which he sent his only-begotten Son into the world that whoever believes in him, whoever receives him might be saved, might be healed in body and soul, as were the ten lepers; and iii) we acknowledge our sins and our impurities, our sickness in sin that is unto death. We confess our sins to him who is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. In so doing, we affirm that the word of God is true, which has said that we all have sinned; we have every one gone our own way. Therefore, we can say that it is our confession that renders all the other sacraments of the Church effective because it is through confession that we open our hearts, the bridal chamber, to the Lord so that he is able to come in and cleanse us from all our unrighteousness and make us clean and beautiful, anoint our face with the oil of gladness, clothe us with the wedding garment, and bring us to the marriage feast of the lamb and his bride and give to us the cup of life, the holy chalice that we may become communicants of life eternal, partakers of the divine nature. For, the Lord won’t come into our hearts if we don’t want him to. He won’t force himself on us. We must freely receive him; but to as many as receive him, to them he gives the power to become children of God, born not of the will or desire of the flesh but of the Spirit of God.

Freely choosing to take up our cross and follow Christ as the Israelites followed Moses, we pass through the waters of our baptism as the Israelites passed through the Red Sea. We are delivered from our enslavement to the passions as the Israelites were freed from their bondage to Pharaoh. Having been baptized into the Church, the body of Christ, the fullness of him who is all in all, we find ourselves on the far shore in the wilderness on our way to the Kingdom of Heaven with the risen Christ as the Israelites were on their way to the Promised Land with Moses. We are in the wilderness, now. We are still in this life, but we have been united with Christ who by his death and resurrection has made the desert of this life to rejoice and to blossom as the rose. We are now strangers and exiles on the earth, pilgrims scattered throughout this worldly desert but united together in the one Holy Spirit, following the one Lord Jesus Christ to our true home, the Heavenly Kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the wilderness, we are in Christ, we are not in the passions that make us sick and lead us to death. In the wilderness of the Church that has been made to rejoice and blossom as the rose, we receive the sacraments of the Church, the life of God's heavenly Spirit, both as a means of spiritual nourishment to sustain us and help us on our earthly pilgrimage and as a taste of the Kingdom which is to come.

The sacramental life of the Church, then, is eschatological; it is of the Last Day. In confession, baptism and chrismation, those who have received Christ have entered into the eschatological mystery revealed in Genesis 1 through the Holy Spirit of Christ. They experience this life in Christ's crucifixion and burial as Holy Friday and Holy Saturday, the Last Day of creation; but in Christ's holy resurrection, they experience the dawning in this life of the First Day of the new creation. It is in this eschatological reality of the Church that the sacrament of Holy Unction is received by the faithful.

In the sacrament of Holy Unction, we use oil mixed with wine. This is what distinguishes the oil of Holy Unction from the oil with which we are anointed in preparation for Baptism, and the chrism with which we are anointed in Holy Chrismation. This gives to the sacrament of Holy Unction its own unique eschatological quality for in Holy Scripture, oil and wine together are signs of the Last Day, the Eschaton. Receiving Holy Unction is a witness to us while we are yet here in the wilderness of this worldly life bounded on all sides by death that we have entered through our death in Christ in Holy Baptism into the eschatological life of Christ's holy resurrection, and that we are now in the wilderness that Christ makes to rejoice and to blossom as the rose on our spiritual pilgrimage to the Kingdom of Heaven.

In Holy Scripture, oil and wine together are used to heal all kinds of maladies. But the chief biblical referent in this service of Holy Unction is the story of the Good Samaritan, which is a parable of dying and rising in Christ in his holy Church, the "inn", where we are tended to until his Second Coming. In the prophets Jeremiah (31:2), Joel (2:24) and Hosea (2:22), oil and wine are signs of the restoration of Israel after God's eschatological judgment against her and the nations. But again, in the vision of the Church, the eschatological judgment against the world is revealed to be the Cross of Christ, on which God the Word, according to St Paul the apostle and Isaiah the prophet, submits in obedience to the Father even to the point of death on the Cross, that he might make the iniquity of us all to fall upon himself so that we might be saved, so that even those who before were not chosen or elect of God will hear God say to them: "You are my people," and they will say, "You are my God" (Hos 2:23). This we take as a prophecy of the Cross of Christ which has opened the Church of God's Elect to all those, both Jews and Gentiles, who will receive him.

But what I find even more compelling is the use in Holy Scripture of oil and wine as an expression of festive joy and as preparation for the wedding feast of the King's Son and his bride (Ps 45). Indeed, where there is sorrow, anointing with oil and wine is suspended. In this light, look again at Mary Magdalene loosening her hair and anointing the feet of Jesus, even as she weeps. The Lord says she is preparing his body for burial; but the act of loosening her hair and anointing his feet with oil, both of which carry nuptial overtones and are associated with joy, show us that much more is happening beneath the surface of the Lord's Crucifixion.

The unenlightened see the Passion of Christ and focus on his agony and suffering. Certainly there is that, but clearly, that the Church is anointing us with oil and wine on this the eve of Holy Thursday, as Mary Magdalene loosens her hair and anoints the feet of Jesus before his death, tells us that the Church is calling us to look much deeper, to the spiritual plane, because she is preparing us for the joy of a marriage feast, leading us to look on the mystery of Christ's agony on the Cross as the consummation of his becoming one with us in all things except for sin, that he might deliver us from sin and its fruit, death. The Church, then, in this service of Holy Unction is showing us what the Cross is all about: it is about the triumph of God over his foes, his trampling down death by his death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life – the life not of this world but of the Spirit of God. The crucifixion of God is the victory of God over death because it is not the act of greed and self-will as was the act of Adam and Eve in the Garden; it is the act of self-giving love of Christ, the Second Adam, and his holy Bride and Mother, the Theotokos, the Second Eve, the Church.

In receiving the sacrament of Holy Unction on this, the eve of Holy Thursday, we do much more than petition God to heal us of body and soul that we may enjoy the good things of this worldly life. We are beseeching him to heal us of body and soul in such a way that the vesture of our soul will be enlightened and that our body will be raised up in spiritual wholeness that we may walk in his ways, that we may eat the words of his teaching which are sweeter than honey and be nourished in the life of his Holy Spirit. We are therefore asking the Lord to do for us whatever he sees that we need that we might be healed in such a way that we might live in the life of the Eschaton. If that means healing us of particular physical or psychic maladies here and now, then thanks be to God; but, if it means that our maladies remain, then we will accept that, too, as God's will for us, understanding that God is calling us to take up our maladies as our cross, and so transforming them into an opportunity for us to practice obedience to his command to take up our cross and follow him; that we may learn in a much deeper way to despise the pleasures of this life that only bring pain and death and to live our life as strangers and aliens on the earth, giving our love to the Bridegroom who comes at Midnight to give us himself, to make us one with him in the partaking of his divine nature, the medicine of immortality, that we may taste even here in our present afflictions how good the Lord is, and that we may live not for this life but for the life of the world to come in his Heavenly Spirit whom we have received even here and now, in whatever maladroit circumstance or affliction we may find ourselves, in the sacraments of his Holy Church. The sacrament of Holy Unction, is given only to the faithful then; not to all ten lepers but to the one leper who comes to Jesus in Thanksgiving, or in the way of the Eucharist, which is the way of confession, of baptism and chrismation. In other words, it is given to those who receive the call of Christ to take up their Cross; for in receiving the sacrament of Holy Unction, we are in effect receiving the call to take up our Cross and follow Christ, to accept whatever comes our way as the cross that God himself is giving us, and to accept that call of the Lord cannot be forced on anyone if it is to be given and received in love. It must be freely received out of a love for the Bridegroom that comes from the bridal chamber of the heart.