

How the Oil is Used

The oil is always either applied using a finger or thumb, or occasionally it is poured on. When applied with a finger or thumb, it is usually applied in the form of a cross. This is to remind us that all blessings come from the crucified Christ, the source of all healing and life for the world.

When anointing accompanies Baptism, the cross is marked in oil on the baptized person's forehead. In this way they are 'sealed' with the Holy Spirit as a reminder of Revelation, in which the servants of God are "sealed upon their foreheads" . In Baptism we are made servants of God.

Confirmation candidates and those seeking healing are anointed in the same way on their foreheads, and for the same reasons. The sick are also anointed on the palms of their hands, and as the need arises the infected part of their bodies may also be anointed. In this way their prayer is acted-out.

In the Sacraments of Confirmation and Ordination the anointing is in addition to the action of 'Laying-on of Hands'. In the Sacrament of Unction the anointing with prayer is at the heart of the rite, and although accompanied by the 'Laying-on of Hands', is itself the essential element.

As with all things Christian, God chooses the ordinary things of this world, and by His Grace makes them extra-special. He then uses them to make His presence felt in the world. He does this when through the Holy Water of the Font He gives new and eternal life to people. He does this supremely when He takes bread and wine at the hands of a priest and returns them as the Body and Blood of Christ. He does this when, by the means of Holy Oils, He pours His healing and life-giving Spirit into the Church and upon Her members.

Come, Holy Spirit,
gracious heavenly dove,
come, fire of love.

Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me;
Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me;
melt me, mould me,
fill me, use me;
Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.

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Holy Trinity Church



What we do in Church and Why!



Anointing with Oil

Oil as a Symbol

We are all familiar with oil, in one form or another, in all aspects of our daily lives. We use it for cooking, heating, lubricating, and in a thousand and one other ways. Without it there would be no industry, no transport, and we would have to do without many of the 'plastic' goods we take for granted.

Oil has always been the 'life-blood' of society, a fact which the Jewish people of the Old Testament were very aware of. The oil which the Jews knew, and which is still in use today, is olive oil and it is the same oil which we use in Church.

For the Jews a plentiful supply of oil, along with corn and wine, was a sign of God's favour. Oil was, and still is, a sign of God's blessing because it represents all that is best in life, God's generosity to the people He loves.

Oil in Church

We use oil in Church in two ways: we burn it in votive lamps, and we anoint people with it. In both cases its use can be traced back to the earliest times, and is recorded in the Old Testament and the New. The Christian Church adopted the use of oil from both Jewish and pagan practice very early in its history.

Although anointing with oil largely fell from favour in the Church of England for several hundred years, its importance has been rediscovered. It has been restored to its proper place in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Its use in the Sacrament of Unction, (Anointing of the sick; sometimes called the oil for healing) and in the Ordination of Priests, is increasingly widespread.

Sacramental Oil

Oil as a symbol reminds us of God's boundless generosity towards us, and of His never-ending love for us. When we use it to anoint people in Church, though, it is much more than merely a symbol, or reminder. It becomes one of the channels by which God's power comes into the world, by which He blesses us with His Holy Spirit.

The oil used is essentially no different to any other olive oil, but it is made special by being set aside specially for God's purposes. God takes the ordinary things of this world, in this case olive oil, and makes them holy. He works through material things to show Himself to the world and to bring people back to Himself.

The Three Oils

The oils used for anointing are specially blessed for this purpose by the Bishop at the Chrism Mass on Maundy Thursday, so called because one of the oils is called 'Chrism'.

There are three oils used in Church, all olive oil but named for the purpose for which they will be used. They are 1. the oil of the sick, 2. the oil of catechumens, and 3. the holy Chrism.

1. The oil of the sick (healing)

In the letter to St. James we read: "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 Lord will raise him up." The rite of anointing the very sick in mind or body, those about to undergo surgery, those nearing death, with the oil of the sick is now readily available in the Church.

This kind of anointing is itself a Sacrament and so whether physical or spiritual strength is

sought, the sufferer can be confident that God will provide it in response to the prayer of faith. Requests for this Sacrament should be made to a priest, and are increasingly welcome.

2. The oil of catechumens (baptism)

A 'catechumen' is somebody who is preparing to become a Christian, and so this oil is used to accompany the Rite of Baptism. When used, anointing at Baptism is a symbol which points to the gift of the Holy Spirit, which comes to the newly baptised person as it did upon Christ at His Baptism in the Jordan. In Baptism we are "born of water and the Spirit", the Holy Spirit which is the gift of Christ to His Church.

This anointing also reminds us that at Baptism we are made part of the Royal Priesthood of the Church. (Our Kings and Queens are anointed at their coronation, as are many priests at their Ordination.)

3. The Holy Chrism

Holy Chrism is the oil used to anoint people at their Confirmation, and which is used to anoint priests at their Ordination. It is also used in the consecration of altars and Church buildings. 'Consecration' means making holy or setting apart for God's purposes. It differs from the other two oils in that it alone is not pure olive oil. A scented balsam is mixed with the oil to make the Chrism.

