

The Thirteenth Liturgical Symposium *Awareness of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick Yesterday and Today* (Łąd on the Warta, October 21, 2016)

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On the liturgical feast of Blessed Jakub Strzemię on Friday, October 21, 2016, the jubilee Thirtieth Liturgical Symposium in Łąd on the Warta, was held in the Major Seminary of the Society of St. Francis de Sales in Łąd on the Warta under the patronage of the Academic Society of St. Francis de Sales and Rev. Dr. Tadeusz Rozmus, SDB, the general counselor of the Polish province of the Salesians. The theme of this year's meeting was: *Awareness of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick Yesterday and Today*. The symposium brought together clergy and laypeople representing various academic centers as well as seminarians from several seminaries. Approximately fifty people took part. The honorary guest of this year's symposium was Rev. Prof. Dr. Hab. Jerzy Stefański, a former consultor of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments and presently a professor emeritus at the Faculty of Theology at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. The conference was opened by Rev. Dr. Hab. Mariusz Chamarczuk, SDB (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw), the rector of the seminary of the Society of St. Francis de Sales in Łąd on the Warta, after which Rev. Dr. Radosław Błaszczyk, SDB, the organizer of the symposium, greeted all the guests, presented the academic accomplishments of the speakers, and introduced the participants to the topic of the symposium.

In the first session, Rev. Dr. Radosław Błaszczyk, SDB, spoke on the topic of *Celebrating the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*; Rev. Prof. Dr. Hab. Jerzy Stefański (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan) spoke on the topic of *Issues Concerning the Editing of the Conciliar Rituals of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*; Rev. Prof. Dr. Hab. Helmut Sobeczko spoke about *Theological Issues Related to the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*; and Dr. Hab. Erwin Matej (a professor of the University of Opole) spoke

about *The Pastoral Aspects of Celebrating the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*.

The first speaker summarized the history of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick from the times of the apostles up to the Second Vatican Council. As he himself noted at the beginning, over the centuries certain theological tendencies and purely pragmatic considerations aroused fear of this visible sign of invisible grace. In the first centuries of Christianity, it was believed that the sacrament of the anointing of the sick was supposed to strengthen the sick person, heal the soul, and even heal the body. Belief in the necessity of and need for this sacrament was widespread. It was not yet reserved for the dying. Apart from the clergy, the ministers of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick also included laypeople, who for this purpose kept in their homes oil blessed by their bishops. It was only in the ninth century that the Church prohibited laypeople from anointing the sick. The speaker noted that this happened through making the priest the only minister of this sacrament. Because priests received a payment for anointing the sick, access to this sacrament became very limited. According to the speaker, another factor contributing to the crisis of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick was tying it to the public celebration of the sacrament of penance. Thus it was put off until the last moment of one's life. Later, Rev. Błaszczyk presented the interpretation of the Council of Florence concerning the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. In the last part of his paper, he explained how the sacrament of the anointing of the sick was understood and administered after the Council of Trent.

The second speaker, Rev. Prof. Dr. Hab. Helmut Sobeczko, dealt with the topic of how the sacrament of the anointing of the sick has been understood since the Second Vatican Council. In the introduction to his paper, he noted that the first three articles of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Second Vatican Council's constitution on the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, was the fruit of discussions and proposals concerning the sacrament that took place both before and during the council. Of more than 9,000 suggestions submitted to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments from around the world, about 1,800 concerned the topic of the liturgy. They concerned three essential subjects: the change of the name of the sacrament from the "last rites" to the "sacrament of the anointing of the sick;" the appropriate time for administering the sacrament under discussion; and the description of the possibilities of accepting the sacrament of the anointing of the sick during the same illness. In the later part of his paper, he discussed

the reform of the rituals of the sacrament as well as the process of editing the rite of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. Next, he presented the essential matters related to the editing of this liturgical book: the theology of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, the sacramental formula, the subject of the sacramental anointing, the minister of the sacrament, the material for anointing, and the regular rite of the anointing of the sick. In the final part of his paper, Rev. Sobeczko shared with the audience his observations that both the council sessions and the work on editing the new rites of anointing the sick had one essential aim: to bring the sacrament back to its proper “owner,” or the sick person, not just the dying person.

In his presentation, the next speaker demonstrated that the Second Vatican Council’s theology of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is found in an analysis of the liturgical texts of the reformed *ordo*. The sacrament of the anointing of the sick should be examined in three essential aspects: the Christocentric, pneumatological, and ecclesial aspects. Each aspect was discussed in detail. When discussing the Christocentric aspect, the speaker noted that many liturgical texts say that Christ Himself is the minister of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, just as He is the minister of the remaining sacraments. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit supports the sick person, being a living gift of the Crucified Christ. Meanwhile, as Rev. Sobeczko noted on the basis of liturgical texts of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, the Third Person of the Holy Spirit gives the grace of forgiving sins, bringing relief and strength when one suffers. Rev. Sobeczko also analyzed the prayer of blessing of the oil used to administer the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. He recalled that this prayer contains the epiclesis, during which the priest makes an epicletic gesture, asking the Holy Spirit to strengthen this oil. In the next part of his paper, Rev. Sobeczko noted the ecclesial aspect of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, emphasizing that the sick person is not alone in his or her illness. On the contrary, his or her ailment brings strength and sanctifies the entire Church community.

The last speaker during the first session, Rev. Dr. Hab. Erwin Matej (a professor of the University of Opole), presented numerous pastoral observations related to the celebration of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick in the Church. He noted at the beginning of his presentation that the sphere of the phenomena under discussion is close to every person, as illness, pain, and suffering are essential parts of human existence. For Rev. Matej, the point of reference to these topics was the liturgical book used during the liturgy of

administering the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. When referring to it, he noticed that pastoral ministry to sick people is not limited to administering the sacrament. Instead, it is a much more encompassing concept. Among others, it assumes the ritual of administering Holy Communion and makes participation in the Church's Sunday liturgy through the media. Rev. Mateja suggested the need for the systematic formation of the faithful within the context of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. This meant becoming appreciative of the fact that the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is not the sacrament of the dying, but it is reserved for the seriously ill. It should not be avoided, but nor should it be abused and treated like some kind of magic. The speaker emphasized that there is a need to show that in order to be fully effective, the sacrament of the anointing of the sick must be received in a conscious way. Furthermore, quoting Rev. Prof. Czesław Krakowiak, he suggested the need for permanent formation of the clergy in the context of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick in the following areas: the psychology of the sick person, the mission of sick people in the Church community, the duty to bring constant and organized help to sick people, and to make one aware of the non-existence of conditional anointing of the dead. Rev. Mateja finished his lecture by stating that both the conciliar documents about the Church and the renewal of the liturgical book clearly emphasize that concern for the sick is among the Church's fundamental aims.

Four lectures of the first session were followed by time for discussion. The participants of the symposium were given the opportunity to discuss certain pastoral matters related to the celebration of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick.

The central moment of the liturgical symposium was the Eucharist celebrated under the leadership of Rev. Prof. Dr. Hab. Jerzy Stefański. A special homily was given by the national pastor of those employed in health care, Rev. Dr. Arkadiusz Zawistowski. The liturgy was accompanied by the singing of a Gregorian chant by the seminary choir under the direction of Rev. Marcin Balawander, SDB.

The following spoke during the second session: Rev. Dr. Mateusz Potoczny (University of Opole) on the topic: *The Anointing of the Sick in the Eastern Liturgies* and Dr. Hab. Tomasz Piorunek (the Chair in Pulmonology, Allergology, and Pulmonological Oncology) on the topic of: *The Medical Aspect of Illness and Dying*.

The first speaker of the afternoon session presented the topic of the anointing of the sick in the Eastern liturgies, using the Byzantine and Assyrian

liturgies as case studies. At the beginning, he noted that all the Christian churches consider care for the sick to be of the greatest importance. Such care concerns all difficult situations, both spiritual and physical, in which the person find him or herself. An evident example of the Church's concern for the sick is above all the numerous prayers offered for them at Mass. When discussing anointing, the Eastern Christian liturgical traditions do not refer to them as a sacrament, as is the case in the Western liturgy. For them, it is one of many mysteries or rites. Rev. Potoczny discussed the connection between the mystery of the anointing of the sick with the mystery of penance evident in the Eastern liturgies. Furthermore, he noticed that the prayer texts speak of illness as the direct or indirect consequence of sin. Those present had the opportunity to learn that in the Byzantine Church the rite of anointing is administered in concelebration. Liturgical regulations speak of the need for seven priests to be present. This is explained by the Biblical symbol of fullness. If possible, their number is limited to two or three. The oil that is used has the power to reconcile sinner with the Lord and also has a cleansing effect. Rev. Potoczny emphasized that in the Eastern Christian churches the rite of anointing the sick reflects their reconciliation with the Church community. At the end of his lecture, he noted that, in general, in all the Eastern churches each ailment, even a spiritual one, makes one capable of receiving the anointing of the sick.

In his paper, the last speaker of the second session focused on the phenomena of illness and dying from the medical perspective. As he himself noted at the beginning of his presentation, the relationship between physician and patient in the context of illness and death is not easy, as it is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. It is not easy to discern that a patient is near death, but the patient should be informed about the progress of his or her ailment and about the prospects. Dr. Hab. Piorunek noted that when a patient's death is looming, the physician's duty is to inform his or her family or caretaker. Next, Dr. Hab. Piorunek familiarized the audience with symptoms of looming death. He mentioned: not eating meals, weight loss, dyspnea, death rattle, the incapability of receiving liquids and medicines, disturbance of one's consciousness, and delirium. Afterwards, the speaker spoke of each sick person's natural need to die in his or her own home among his or her loved ones. However, statistics show that, at a national level, half of patients die in hospitals. This is substantiated by the fears of the patient's loved ones related to the inability to deal with such a difficult existential context. At the

conclusion of his lecture, Dr. Hab. Piorunek mentioned several essential topics related to accompanying dying persons. First, no dying person should be left alone; second, his or her non-verbal form of communicating should be learned; and, third, the dying person should have worthy conditions for experiencing one of life's most important moments.

Similarly, as was the case during the first session, there was time for discussion after two lectures. The organizer of the liturgical symposium in Łąd on the Warta summarized the sessions. In his final speech, he thanked all the speakers for bringing the topic of the symposium closer to the audience. He praised those present at the symposium as well as the host, who put much effort into organizing this event. He also announced another academic meeting on October 20, 2017, which would deal with the sacrament of holy orders.