

The Church Continues Christ's Ministry of Healing

The Church carries forward Christ's healing ministry in a variety of approaches. Catholic families in countless ways care for family members who are ill. There are numerous inspiring stories of an aging spouse who personally ministers to an ailing spouse in cases of Alzheimer's and other illnesses. Caregivers find that faith and prayer mean a great deal to them in these situations.

A multitude of religious orders and congregations have established Catholic hospitals to take care of the physical and spiritual needs of the sick. Church-sponsored hospice care is another form of this ministry of healing. Besides the doctors, nurses, and chaplains, there are occasional instances of individuals with the charism (gift) of healing. "The Holy Spirit gives to some a special charism of healing, so as to make manifest the power of grace of the risen Lord" (CCC, no. 1508).

Millions of believers journey to shrines like the one at Lourdes, often in search of physical cures but always to experience a deepening of faith. The Church requires healing miracles as part of the canonization process, the procedure for declaring the sainthood of a given person.

Above all, the Church continues Christ's healing ministry in the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. St. James describes its celebration in apostolic times: "Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters [priests] of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven" (Jas 5:14-15).



Attendants prepare to carry a statue of Mary in procession at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in southwestern France.