

Holy Oil

Because of the globalization of cuisine, most of us have become familiar with the role of Olive Oil in Mediterranean food. Many restaurants offer dipping oil with the bread provided for a meal. Olive trees feature prominently in the Bible and in images we have of Italy, Greece, and the Holy Land.

Other forms of oil are also familiar to us apart from their uses in food: Health and beauty aids use a variety of oils in ointments and creams to treat wounds, enhance skin, or to soothe sore muscles. And, though it is a relatively modern development, oil is hydrocarbon fuel we burn for energy . . . it gives us light.

In the ancient world, olive oil had many uses and there were connotations which came from those uses which were applied to the realm of the sacred: It had a medicinal value, and it was used as a base for perfume, and it was believed to give strength to athletes when applied to the body. Moreover, the glistening effect of oil applied to skin was suggestive of the bestowal of a share in God's glory on a person.

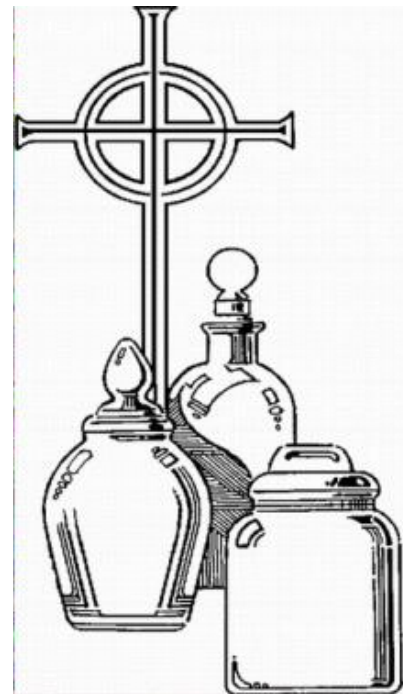
These connotations carry over into the use of oil in our faith within the Sacraments. There are clear references in the Bible to the use of oil for such purposes as healing the sick (James 5:14, Mk 6:13) as well as acts of consecration (Exodus 30:22). Kings, priests, altars, and temples were "anointed" with oil.

Of course, "Messiah" and "Christ" mean the anointed one in Hebrew and Greek, respectively. Had Jesus' "anointing" been an earthly one, it would have certainly involved oil: But, of course, Jesus was "anointed" by the heavenly father in Eternity.

The Holy Oils, which will be blessed by the Bishop on Tuesday of Holy Week, will be used for the Sacraments of Anointing of the Sick, Confirmation, and Holy Orders. Though they are used in

Sacramental Rites, they are not, in themselves, Sacraments: Instead, they are called "Sacramentals:" This designation makes them more akin to Holy Water. Sacramentals are not effective in the same way as sacraments; instead, they extend the effect of the sacraments and are used by Christians in reference to the sacraments.

Hence, when used in a Baptism, the Oil of Catechumens anticipates and signifies the strengthening, purifying, and consecrating effects of the Sacrament itself. As such, the oils are more than mere symbols; but they do not convey grace of themselves in the way sacraments do: they require the engagement of faith in the Sacraments of Christ through the Church in order to be effective. The oils, and other sacramentals, must not be used as "good luck charms" or in superstitious ways.



The three Holy Oils are as follows: The **Oil of Catechumens**, (used as part of the Rite of Baptism), **The Oil of the Sick**, (used to anoint the Sick), **Sacred Chrism**, (used at Confirmation and Holy Orders). The first two oils are pure Olive Oil. Chrism is a mixture of Olive oil and Balsam; making it somewhat of a perfume: As such, it signifies dignity and consecration in the Lord.