BERNICE: Oh yes, Margery, I can't wait to have this cataract removed.

PRIEST: Hello Bernice.

BERNICE: Father.

PRIEST: I came to see if you would like to receive Anointing of the Sick?

BERNICE: Last Rites? Am I dying?

PRIEST: No, no, no, not yet.

CATHOLIC CENTRAL OPENING TITLES

LIBBY: Welcome to Catholic Central, I'm Libby.

KAI: And I'm Kai.

LIBBY: What do you do when people get sick?

KAI: Lie to my boss about having to take care of them so I can get out of work.

LIBBY: Or pray for them?

KAI: Oh, of course.

LIBBY: Jesus encouraged people to turn to him for healing. The Catholic Church takes Jesus at his word. In addition to private prayers, for serious conditions, there is even a sacrament of healing.

KAI: Otherwise known as the Catholic sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.

LIBBY: People may ask, "Is it a magic spell to cure diseases?" "Is it some type of faith healing where people pray instead of seeking treatment?" "Is it a multi-level marking scheme for extremely overpriced essential oils that do nothing?"

KAI: No and no respectively. Anointing of the Sick is a ritual through which God connects with us, and reminds us that He's present in our lives.

LIBBY: Even Catholics can be confused about this Rite.

BERNICE: Am I dying?

LIBBY: Which comes from the fact that most Catholics have never seen in it person. It is most often celebrated in private settings with small groups of people.

KAI: It's the quieter, more introverted sacrament.

LIBBY: So when would Catholics go beyond just praying for healing, and ask for the sacrament?

KAI: If there is a serious illness, a change in chronic condition, upcoming surgery or even if an illness has become difficult to bear.

LIBBY: Like if a person is hit with severe depression, or feels the effects of aging.

KAI: You can go to the parish. Call and ask for a priest to come to you, or if you're in the hospital, ask for the priest on-call.

BERNICE: You should tell people when it's happening, so maybe they'd actually show up to visit their old, sick relative.

KAI: Once there, the priest may ask if the sick person wants to speak privately for a moment.

LIBBY: Sometimes people want to confess.

KAI: After that is completed, they have time to talk. Ideally, family members, close friends and even caregivers will be part of it.

BERNICE: Ideally.

KAI: The priest will often ask about the illness, and comfort the people gathered.

LIBBY: Then the really sacramenty part, the priest puts on a stole and prays from the Ritual Book.

KAI: There are several versions of the rite, longer and shorter, to accommodate the needs of the patient.

LIBBY: You don't want to have an hour long rite for someone who is in great pain or discomfort.

KAI: In the basic rite, there is an opening prayer, and then often a little Penitential Rite asking forgiveness. You know, “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy,” like at the beginning of Mass.

LIBBY: Then the priest lays hands on the person's head, and they pray silently.

KAI: This follows Jesus' practice of laying hands on the sick.

LIBBY: The priest then takes a vial of oil – special olive oil that's been blessed, usually by a bishop, called, obviously enough, Oil of the Sick.

KAI: He says a prayer, and rubs a cross of oil on the person's forehead, and then on each palm.

LIBBY: In Jesus' time, it was common to anoint sick people and their wound.

KAI: But the practice was not just physical medicine. Olive oil was a symbol of the blessing of God.

LIBBY: Then the priest leads whoever is gathered in praying the Our Father, followed by a closing prayer.

KAI: The family members and priests, themselves, have often talked about how the rite brings peace, and sometimes even physical relief from suffering.

BERNICE: Shhh.

KAI: So, you might be asking, what about Last Rites?

BERNICE: Am I dying?

KAI: No, you're fine.

LIBBY: Last Rites is one of the forms of the sacrament for people who are possibly near death.

KAI: The rite is a little more involved and also included confession, readings from the Bible, renewal of baptismal promises and the Eucharist.

LIBBY: Which in this case has a neat Latin name, Viaticum, meaning provision for the journey into next life.

KAI: Now, some people wonder, "Well, what about people who die unexpectedly, and never get Anointing of the Sick? Do they need it to get into Heaven?"

LIBBY: Fortunately, the answer is a definite no. Anointing of the Sick is a help and comfort to a dying person, but there's no reason to worry about the soul of someone who didn't receive it.

KAI: So, to sum up, during Anointing of the Sick, a priest visits a sick person to pray with them and their families.

LIBBY: The priest lays his hand on the sick person, and uses blessed oil to, surprise, anoint them.

KAI: The ritual isn't a substitute for medicine, but expresses our desire for physical healing, and prepares us to receive whatever kind of healing we need.

LIBBY: Whether physical or spiritual. Serious illness can be a frightening and confusing experience in itself, but if people are feeling guilty about where they've gone long in their life, the anointing can help them feel God's love and mercy.

KAI: And maybe even healing.

LIBBY: For Catholic Central, I'm Libby.

KAI: And I'm Kai. Till next time, thanks for watching.

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