

GAS Letter January 2012

Dear Fellow Members of the Guild:

Normally, I would begin by thanking the host of our Annual Requiem and Council Meeting, but as it is my own self, perhaps that would be unnecessary and unattractive! In point of fact, we had a very nice meeting with the Council, and the next morning the Annual Requiem was offered at the Church of the Resurrection. We had a very lively and engaging sermon from Father Robert Kerr, Council Member, and Rector of St John's Church, Westland, Michigan, and our music was the *Requiem des Rois de France* by Eustache du Caurroy, almost certainly a North American première. The music was written just before the composer's death and was, sadly, first used shortly thereafter at the funeral for the assassinated Henri IV in 1610. It remained the Requiem for French kings and was used at the funerals of Louis XIII, Louis XIV, and Louis XV. Poor Louis XVI had no funeral until the Restoration in 1814, and therefore the tradition came to an end. David Enlow, Organist and Choir Master of Resurrection, and our Choir, did a wonderful job as usual. One hopes that Henri IV, who thought Paris worth a Mass, ended up benefiting from the fine Requiem that was given him in 1610.

Our 2012 Annual Mass will take place on Saturday, 10 November 2012 at All Saints' Church, Ashmont, in the Dorchester section of Boston, at the kind invitation of Father Michael Godderz, SSC, their parish priest and a member of the Guild's Council. While a New Yorker can never concede that Boston is the Hub of the Universe as they claim, there is no question that it is one of America's most beautiful, attractive and cultural cities! All Saints' is a very lovely church, widely recognized as one of Ralph Adams Cram's masterpieces, and their long men and boys' choir tradition is also a very important one musically. I am sure that all those in attendance will be edified by both. There will be further details in the July 2012 number of the Intercession Paper, but do save the date if you are within striking distance of Boston or would like to make the journey.

One of the very nice facets of the 2011 Requiem is that we decided to engage a photographer and a videographer for the Mass. This was done as part of a desire to bring the Guild more to the attention of potential members through the medium of the internet. The Guild has had a website for some time ([www.guildofallsouls.net](http://www.guildofallsouls.net)) which is attractively designed and maintained by designer Lee Ryder. We have a lot of printed material, but not much in the way of pictures. The still photos taken at the Annual Requiem will make a good advertisement for the Guild, its Requiem, and for prayer for the dead in general. As for the videographer, he will make for us DVDs which can be purchased by the Guild's members at a very reasonable cost, and will also be posted on the Guild's website and to YouTube in fifteen minute episodes, which will permit people to watch the entire Mass. If you are not particularly given to using the Internet, you may find this all rather odd, but I can tell you that it is an inexpensive, efficient way of bringing the Guild's message to a great number of people. It is also true that if you, your business or a group is has no "on line" presence, you are invisible to most people under 40.

One of the aims and objects of the Guild has been (since the beginning) the furtherance of the use of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, or Anointing of the Sick. It was called "Extreme" unction not because of any bold character or because it was to be used only just before death. It merits that name because it is, in any case, the last of the anointings of the body. Baptism contains the first, just before the Sacrament, when the candidate is anointed with Oil of the Catechumens, and contains the second, just after the Sacrament, when the neophyte is anointed with Sacred Chrism. Confirmation candidates receive anointing with Sacred Chrism, as do priests as part of their ordination, and bishops as part of their consecrations, and it is also used in the consecration of chalices and patens and bells. For the Christian, however, its last use is in the Sacrament of Unction, when a serious illness takes place. For many, especially older communicants, the appearance of the priest with holy oil (in this case the Oil of the Sick),

was a frightening prospect as its use was virtually restricted to the last moments before death. This use, however, was not consistent with the theology of the church and came about because of widespread popular misconceptions about the Sacrament, which then fed into its rare use.

As is the case with many other issues, Catholics in the Episcopal Church thought, perhaps naively, that the question of the Sacrament of Unction had been settled when it was successfully inserted into the Book of Common Prayer 1979. While the form printed is certainly quite satisfactory, it does permit of some oddities (for example the consecration of the oil by a priest at the time of administration, when this consecration is reserved to bishops and most fittingly at the Chrism Mass on Maundy Thursday, and the administration of the Sacrament by Deacons and even laymen, even more serious a breach of tradition and theology), but it brought the Sacrament to the front and centre of “ordinary” Episcopal Churches and not just out-and-out Anglo Catholic churches. In this sense, one might suggest that the Guild had won a victory of sorts. As is often the case, however, what seems a victory sometimes just creates a new problem! The problem here is that the Sacrament was widely introduced into parishes in the Episcopal Church but with little or no teaching either to the laity or indeed by the seminaries to priests in formation. Being the holder of a Master of Divinity degree from The General Seminary of the Episcopal Church, I must admit that the Sacrament of Unction, its history, theology or practical administration, was never mentioned once in three years. It is no surprise, therefore, that some very surprising things began to happen. In the first wave of these was the “healing Mass” or “healing service” which began to appear all over. In theory, these were planned on services of this kind in shrines all over the world, like Lourdes, or Walsingham, or the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington or Holy Hill in Wisconsin. Large numbers of gravely ill people make pilgrimage to these places, and rightly so. It is therefore salutary and beneficial for priests on staff in these places, or who take pilgrimages to them, to offer the Sacrament of Unction in large group services. Such conditions do not exist in parish churches, however, and we see regularly in all sorts of churches, a “healing mass” in which all twenty communicants present feel obliged to go forward and receive a very serious Sacrament of the Church about which they know little and for which they have not been prepared. It is equally obvious that it is unlikely that all have the kind of serious and grave illness for which the Sacrament is intended. I once visited a friend’s church and witnessed this. “I have a bad cold”, one lady explained. Her friend added, “And I don’t want to get one!”. These are hardly reasons to receive the Sacrament of Unction, and I hope I need scarcely add that it is not a preventative for colds or any other malady, as that is clearly in the realm of the witch doctor not the Christian priest. Even stranger is another misconception which is currently becoming very widespread. Christians who are in attendance at such healing services will sometimes come forward to receive the Sacrament *on another’s behalf!* Here, in a well-intended but misguided and ill-instructed effort to help, communicants of the Church attempt to receive one Sacrament to affect another’s soul. As we clearly do not undergo Baptism for another person, Confirmation, Ordination, Marriage or make another person’s confession for him, we can hardly expect to be able to have this Sacrament avail for the healing of another’s soul. Prayer for another’s healing is very pleasing in God’s sight, it is efficacious, and should be very much part of our lives, but we cannot receive a Sacrament to benefit another.

To be perfectly clear, the Guild teaches Catholic Truth in this matter. That is that the Sacrament of Unction is available (*like all other Sacraments*) only to those who are baptised. If the person in question is conscious, there should be some introduction to the Sacrament either from a relation or the priest, so that the person in question knows what will be happening to him. (This will also prevent the fear that the priest’s arrival is a death sentence!) The Sacrament’s effects will be known to God alone – but they will either involve healing and return to the normal course of life, mitigation of the severest effects in a measure of healing, or preparation for a holy Christian death. There is no point in obscuring the last possibility as otherwise a cruel and false hope is held out to the recipient and his or her family and friends, rather than the truth that sometimes the Sacrament is used by God not to bring healing but to pave the way to bring his child home to Him. In my last parish, a week after the St Blasius Day blessing of

throats, one of my people came up to me confused and indignant. She had received the throat blessing, she reminded me, but then contracted a terrible strep throat! Clearly, she had the idea that there was a money-back guarantee from God or at least St Blasius! We must not allow this deception to attach to the Sacrament of Unction; it would be at the very least deceptive and at worst devastating.

The form of the Sacrament varies, but always includes anointing by the priest using Oil of the Sick which has been blessed by a bishop. Unlike Sacred Chrism, nothing else is infused with the olive oil. If the Prayer Book Rite is followed, the person will most likely be anointed on the forehead. If the Roman Rite is used, it will involve anointing on the seats of the senses, the eyes, nose, mouth, ears, and the palms of the hands (top of the hands for priests and bishops), and the feet (which may be omitted for any reasonable cause). The Sacrament is concerned with healing or preparation for death, but also with prayer for the remission of sins. It is therefore often placed after a sacramental confession, and this is much to be encouraged, though not of course required, especially in the case of those unconscious or nearly so. If the illness be very grave or death near, the priest will often simply ask the person if he or she is truly sorry for sins committed. A simple yes or nod of the head suffices, and allows the recipient a moment of contrition, sorrow for sins. It is very nice if others are present for the Sacrament of Unction (though not of course for the Sacrament of Penance if it precedes). If recovery to full health is granted by God, prayers of thanksgiving should always be made, and it is fitting that an offering be made either to the Church, or a hospital or nursing home, especially if this is a church institution, or perhaps an offering may be made to research into the disease itself or to help those still suffering.

The last note to be made about the Sacrament of the Sick, as it is often called, is that it only comes about when the priest *knows that the person is ill!* Priests are not omniscient, and you must not rely on word of mouth from someone else to tell him. My own experience is that evil or salacious gossip travels very fast in the church, but helpful news much more slowly. As soon as you find that you are ill or someone for whom you are responsible is ill, call your parish priest. He will be happy to visit you in hospital or at home, or if you are well enough to get to church, he can administer the Sacrament before or after Mass. It is normally administered only once in the course of any given illness, but in the case of long-term illness, for example with cancer, it can be administered upon relapse or another phase of the disease. Laying on of hands with prayer is not the same as the Sacrament of Unction, and can be offered at any time by a priest, and is often used for less serious illnesses, or when Unction has already been administered. The important thing is that the Sacrament of Unction is the way Our Lord has provided for the Christian to make God and the Church part of his suffering, perhaps part of his cure, and definitely a help along the way of his pilgrimage to God, whether God is a goal coming quickly or latterly.

I very well remember the case of the GAS Branch Secretary of my last parish who was eventually a very elderly lady, who had retired to St Anna's Home in Philadelphia, once run by the All Saints Sisters, and eventually ended her days in a nursing home next to the Roman Catholic Basilica of SS Peter & Paul. She was a high spirited and sometimes cantankerous old lady, but full of faith and lived to be nearly 100 years old. Her death came in due course, and because of a timely telephone call, I was able to be present. After I had cleared the room, she made her confession. Her friends present, including Sister Ellen Elizabeth and Sister Jane Teresa, came back into the room and she received the Sacrament of Unction with all the anointings (as she had wished), and finally the Blessed Sacrament in the form of Viaticum (the last reception of Holy Communion by the communicant as food for the journey). The prayers for the dying were said, including the Litany, which all her friends joined in. The Sisters held lighted candles, as is the very nice custom, which reminded us all of the lighted candle given her in Baptism nearly a hundred years earlier. I finished the commendation ("Depart O Christian soul...") and we stood there a moment in silence. I then packed up my kit, and prepared to take my leave. With a small sigh, Elsie Williams died. In the notice to the parish, I used, without thinking of it much, the customary phrase that she had "died fortified by the Rites of the Church". As I thought back on that afternoon over the last twenty years or so, I have often thought how beautifully all that transpired, and how important it is that the Church be

prepared to offer to her communicants as much of those Rites as is possible and appropriate in the circumstances. It is the birthright of every Catholic Christian, and is both the least and the most that the Church can do.

Yours in the Holy Souls,