

Viaticum

As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever. ~ John 6:57-58

WHEN THE BODY AND BLOOD OF JESUS is received as the last sacrament of our earthly journey, it is called "Viaticum" because Jesus is "with you on the way." He loves you "to the end" (Jn 13:1). To have Jesus "with you on the way" is a happy death.

Rite of Viaticum

While the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick may be celebrated at the beginning of serious illness, Viaticum is given only when death is very close and the dying person is still able to participate and respond.

If possible, the Rite of Viaticum is celebrated within the context of Mass and includes these four additional elements: 1) the renewal of baptismal vows; 2) a litany; 3) a special communion prayer; and 4) an Apostolic Pardon.

In the same way that we begin our life as children of God in Baptism through the repenting of sin and professing faith (or in the case of an infant whose parents and godparents do this for him or her), the dying are asked again to renew their baptismal vows using the words of the Creed.

A litany follows the profession of faith. In the litany, the priest begins by inviting those present to pray for the dying person. Next, the priest recalls Jesus' promise that "he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (Jn 6:54), where there will be no pain, sorrow, sadness, or separation.

At the usual time, the dying per-

son receives the Eucharist. Immediately after their reception, the priest adds, "May the Lord Jesus Christ protect you and lead you to eternal life" (*Pastoral Care of the Sick* 193).

As part of the concluding rites, the priest may choose to give an Apostolic Pardon. This great gift is clearly understood by reading the priest's words: "Through the holy mysteries of our redemption, may almighty God release you from all punishments in this life and in the life to come. May he open to you the gates of paradise and welcome you to everlasting joy" (*Pastoral Care of the Sick* 195). All priests have been given this power to forgive "all punishments in this life and in the life to come" by Jesus when he said to Peter, "whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven" (Mt 16:19).

(CCC 1524-1525)



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The Church desires that the faithful near death receive Holy Communion if possible