

At some stage of your life you may have come across Singer Sewing Machine Oil. Anyone who has used a sewing machine is probably familiar with this oil. The brand is associated with Singer sewing machines and both the machines and the oil have been around a long time. But Singer Sewing Machine Oil is not limited to use in sewing machines. It is often advertised as a multi-purpose oil for household and industrial use, an oil that can be used on sewing machines and knitting machines, on clocks and bicycles and on many other items that need a spot of oil. A very handy product that has many different uses.

Our celebration this evening does not directly involve Singer Sewing Machine Oil but it does involve another multi-purpose oil. It involves the olive oil that is used in a number of sacraments.

In the course of the Mass this evening, we will bless the Oil of Catechumens which is used in connection with the sacrament of baptism. We will bless the Oil of Chrism which is also used at baptism and then at confirmation. In addition, chrism is used at the ordination of priests and bishops. We will bless the Oil of the Sick which is used in the sacrament of the anointing for those who are ill.

In all these sacraments, we could say that the pouring out of the oil is a sign of the gifts of God being poured out upon us. At the same time, the oil is given some different meanings in the various sacraments.

One of the great teachers in the early centuries of the church, St Augustine, spoke about what goes to make a sacrament. He said, "The word comes to the element and we have a sacrament." For example, we might have the element of water and the action of pouring water over someone's head. If there were no words, this would remain simply pouring water, but when we add the words, "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", then we have the sacrament of baptism. The words spell out the meaning of the pouring of the water.

Likewise with the element of oil. The words that go with the anointing spell out the meaning of that particular anointing.

Before a person is baptised, there is an anointing with the oil of catechumens. In that case we say, "We anoint you with the oil of salvation in the name of Christ our Saviour; may he strengthen you with his power." As we anoint, we ask that Christ will pour out his strength and power upon the one to be baptised.

When someone is anointed with the oil of chrism in the sacrament of confirmation, we say "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." The anointing is a sign of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and all the gifts that the Spirit brings, gifts such as wisdom to make good choices and courage to follow Christ even when this is difficult.

In the ordination of priests, the bishop anoints the candidate's hands with chrism and says, "The Father anointed our Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. May Jesus preserve you to sanctify the Christian people and to offer sacrifice to God." The anointing marks the priest as one who should lead the people in living holy lives and giving praise to the heavenly Father.

In anointing the sick we pray, "Through this holy anointing, may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin, save you and raise you up."

The olive oil that we bless this evening is very much a multi-purpose oil. In the sacraments we celebrate, this oil will be a sign of the multi-sided care of God. God cares for us in many ways according to our needs at different times.

In baptism, confirmation, ordination and the anointing of the sick, the anointing can be a reminder of God's love, a love that is poured out upon us at each stage of our life.