



# St. Michael the Archangel Oil

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## What is the oil of St Michael the Archangel?

I looked up at the grotto of apparitions. In front of me was a group of several hundred people waiting to be anointed. It was January 2024. After more than sixteen centuries, I was given the opportunity to consecrate the oil of St Michael the Archangel. The small bottles spread out in the basket glowed with an unusual radiance. I saw the same radiance in the eyes of the people who approached in faith and asked for a few drops of oil. I prayed to the Angel of the Gargano that this new sign would awaken love and hope in people.

I asked that trust in his intercession would be rewarded with healing, liberation and empowerment. This was the beginning of a new form of worship that we now call the Oil of St Michael the Archangel.

## The efficacy and composition of the fragrance

God knows how to surprise. Every time I pick up a bottle of the oil I look forward to seeing what it will do. At first I only intended to use it in my retreat ministry, but when I saw how much interest there was in this unusual liquid, I began to ask others what they thought about spreading the idea of blessing the oil in honour of St Michael the Archangel. It turned out that many people were waiting for this new sign of the activity of the Prince of Angels. Even then, at the Shrine in Gargano, the blessing of the oil attracted crowds. Everyone wanted to know the composition, the beautiful fragrance, the meaning and above all the efficacy of this form of devotion. A few months ago an article appeared in our magazine giving the biblical and historical context of the anointing with oil. At the time, I was not quite sure whether such oil was necessary and how to anoint it effectively. **I sent a request for approval of the prayer of blessing to the Metropolitan Curia in the Archdiocese of Przemyśl, Poland. The positive answer from Archbishop Adam Szal came on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2024.**

The first mention of the oil of St Michael the Archangel appears in Constantinople, mentioned by the historian Sozomen in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The anointing oil was taken from a lamp that burned continuously in front of an icon of St Michael in a monastery. Numerous testimonies attest to its healing properties.

## The miracles that took place

It is worth quoting Sozomen's detailed account in the 'History of the Church', in the chapter entitled '*On the temples built by Constantine the Great and on the city bearing his name: how it was founded and the buildings erected in it*', and finally on the church of Archangel Michael in the Sosthenium and the miracles that took place there:

"It turned out that many people were waiting for this founded, and also to the mercy and generosity of its inhabitants towards the poor. For this city is so able to win sympathy for the faith in Christ that many Jews and almost all pagans embrace Christianity there. And because it became the capital just at the time when the Christian religion had grown in numbers, it knew neither pagan altars nor temples nor sacrifices, unless we disregard the fact that attempts in this direction were later made for a time by the Emperor Julian, and immediately died out. Constantine, therefore, showered this new city of Christ, and at the same time the city to which he gave his own name, with honours and adorned it with numerous and great temples.

"God himself also supported the emperor's zeal, and through his revelations gave assurance that the churches scattered around the city were holy and brought salvation. The church that became most famous at that time, both to strangers and to the inhabitants of the city, was the church that stood on the site once called Hestiai. It is now called Michaelion, and those who sail from Pont to Constantinople have it on their right, with a distance of about thirty-five stadia separating the sailor from it and more than seventy stadia separating the walker who circles the strait in the middle. The area was given its present name because, according to popular belief, Michael, the Archangel of God, is said to have appeared there. And having experienced a great blessing myself, I fully agree that this is true. Moreover, it has been proved by the experience of a whole series of tangible facts, also by others. Some, surprised by terrible accidents or dangers from which there is no escape, others, plagued by sickness and unprecedented suffering, found deliverance from misfortune after praying to God there."

## St James words are engraved above the door

These stories intrigued me and I began to search the books of the Old Testament for the first mention of the use of oil in a sacred text. It quickly became apparent that the book of Genesis mentions an unusual oil and the stone that was anointed with it. In the 28<sup>th</sup> chapter of that book we read: "When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.' And he departed with trembling, and said: 'O that this place is terrifying! Surely this is the house of God and the gate of heaven!' So when he got up in the morning, he took the stone he had put under his head, set it up as a stele and poured oil on it" (vv. 16-18).

A chill went through me as I understood the meaning of this text. The words of St James are engraved above the door of the Sanctuary of St Michael the Archangel on the Gargano. They clearly refer to an apparition that took place there in ancient times. Stone and oil were connected in a bizarre way. First, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Bishop Pucinelli asked the locals to take stones from the grotto, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the oil consecrated by the missionaries appears in the same grotto. Oil and stone complete their symbolism. The stone gives strength, durability and is a symbol of Christ. The oil smooth's, gives radiance, brings comfort, heals wounds and is a sign of mercy. When asked by the faithful about its composition and production, I said that the oil of Saint Michael the Archangel consists of very simple ingredients. They are: vegetable oil and essential extracts of rose and geranium.

Oil was used for cultic purposes by the Greeks, Romans and in the Old Testament. Christianity did not refer to the religious but to the secular use of oil.

People in the Mediterranean cultural area used oil as a food, as a cosmetic, as a source of light and as a medicine to heal wounds. All these uses of oil found their way into the liturgy. People valued oil for its healing properties. It was therefore a suitable material for the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. The anointing of the sick is the strengthening of a person for the final battle against Satan, so that he can 'slip' out of his snare. Since sin, as a disease of the soul, was considered to be the work of Satan, oil was used in the sacraments that took away sin, i.e. baptism, the sacrament of the sick, and for a time also in the sacrament of penance (Syria, Gaul).

**The scent of roses and geraniums, a characteristic feature of the oil, should also be mentioned here.** The technique of distilling rose flowers was invented in Persia in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. The main rose used in the production of rose oil was the Damascus rose. The rich symbolism of the rose alludes to love, beauty, perfection, but also blood. In religious paintings, the rose takes on a different meaning, referring to martyrdom, forgiveness and resurrection, all with rose thorns.

It is important to note our ancestors used the geranium, to prepare medicinal infusions for various respiratory infections. Freshly picked and crushed leaves were also used as a remedy for skin diseases, middle ear infections and as an ingredient in skin care mixtures. Geranium leaves contain essential oils with antiviral, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory properties, and have a mild sedative effect and can help with a sore ear or a bad runny nose: simply crush the leaf to release the juice. The geranium symbolises purity, innocence, healing power and deep spirituality.

## Testimonies of healing

Just a few days after the blessing, I began to receive testimonies of the effectiveness of the oil. A friend described in detail the miraculous healing of a child: "Good Lord, today eleven-year-old Gabriella whose aneurysm in her head burst three weeks ago, came out of hospital. My heartbroken neighbour asked for prayer. In tears she told me what had happened. I gave her the oil of St Michael and suggested she anoint the whole body of the child - the head, arms, legs. It was doubtful this would be allowed, since Gabriella was in intensive care and undergoing tests as the doctors were planning operations to save her life. I recommended she ask the nurse for an anointing, she took the oil to the hospital the same day, a Saturday. On Monday Gabriella woke up to the amazement of everyone! The doctors no longer needed to operate. The neighbour came to see me and personally told me she was grateful to God and St Michael for saving Gabriella."

## Pray with faith to Jesus Christ

This story proves to me that the oil of Saint Michael the Archangel is extremely necessary for the world and for people. At the same time, I would like to emphasise that its effect is not magical! It is about faith in Jesus Christ, who is our Saviour and who wants the good of all. God can use an object to persuade people to believe, to pray, to love. Man responds to this call with devotion.

Of particular recent interest for the Michaelite devotion are the Oil of St Michael the Archangel, the Stone from the Grotto of Gargano and the booklet 'The Great Entrustment to St Michael the Archangel'. All these forms of devotion complement each other and show that St Michael the Archangel is far from having finished his mission of showing people ways to fight evil and, ultimately, to follow Christ with fervour.

The prayer included in the rite of the blessing of the oil confirms this: "Almighty God, whom the hordes of angels tremblingly serve and whose heavenly ministry we praise, we ask You to look graciously upon this oil which we have received through Your mercy, and to bless and sanctify it. You have given it to us for anointing, so that we may sing a song of thanksgiving to You, the living and true God. Grant that those who use this oil, which we bless in Your Name, may be delivered from all suffering, sickness and the snares of their enemies. May it serve to ward off all afflictions from man, whom You have created in Your image and redeemed with the priceless blood of Your Son, so that he may no longer suffer from the wound inflicted by the ancient serpent."

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