

grace to drive away devils and to cast out diseases; that whatever in the house or possessions of the faithful may be sprinkled by this water may be freed from everything unclean and delivered from whatever is hurtful. But no spirit or pestilence or baleful breath abide therein; let all the snares of the enemy whom lie in wait be driven forth that everything threatening the safety or peace of the dwellers therein may be banished by the sprinkling of this water; so that the health which they seek by calling upon Thy holy Name may be guarded from all assault."

Of the three other kinds of holy water, that which is blessed for use in the Easter season is much like the ordinary holy water. This is blessed with a different formula, but its value and use are much the same. When the Easter water has been blessed on Holy Saturday morning, part of it is placed in the baptismal font. While the rest, some is used for sprinkling the people immediately after the blessing. Later the water is distributed to the faithful for use in their homes until Pentecost.

After the blessing of the faithful with the new Easter water on Holy Saturday, some of this water is poured into the baptismal font and the priest makes his oil of catechumens and holy chrism with it to form the baptismal water.

After this, Baptism is conferred on any who are present to receive the sacrament. The water is then kept in the font for use in future Baptisms. This same kind of water is blessed on the eve of Pentecost, because

Holy Saturday, and the eve of Pentecost where the traditional base for Baptisms in the early church.

Gregorian water is blessed for use in the consecration of churches, altars and altar stones. After being mixed with wine, ashes, and salt and receiving its blessing, this water is sprinkled on the walls of the church by the celebrant, usually a Bishop. This water is so named because its use was ordered by Pope Gregory IX. It is also called water of consecration.

While all these forms of blessed of water are used for sacred purposes by the Church, only ordinary holy water and Easter water directly concerned the faithful and are provided for their use. Many Catholics to take-home containers of the Easter water on Holy Saturday preserve this water for use throughout the year. Easter water, however, is blessed for use only in the Easter season, that is until the feast of Pentecost. Ordinary holy water should be used in homes at all other times of the year.

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Pamphlet 443

## **Holy Water**

Blessed or Holy Water is a Sacramental. Sacramentals are holy things or actions which the Church is given to the faithful for the spiritual benefit. They are called sacramentals because they have some outward resemblance to the sacraments and obtain favor from God. They must not be confused with the sacraments which were given by Christ himself. Sacramentals obtain favor from God through the prayer of the church offered for those who use them.

The three kinds of sacramentals are blessings given by priests and bishops, exorcism against evil spirits, and blessed are objects of devotion. The blessings of priests and bishops include the blessings of churches, of people, of holy water, of candles, and of palms. Some of the blessed objects of devotion most used by Catholics are holy water, candles, ashes, palms, crucifixes, medals, rosaries, scapulars, and images of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and the Saints. Other sacramentals are the prayers of the church and alms given in the name of the church.

Water, the natural and universal cleansing agent, has been used from very ancient times to signify the purification of the soul just as it actually cleanses the body. The ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and even into you in North America used water in purification ceremonies. Fields were sprinkled with water in preparation for crops, and armies were blessed with water

before going into battle. In the material order, water is the common purifier, so that it was natural for man to see in it a symbol of spiritual purification too. The Law of Moses in the Old Testament called for the use of water and liturgical sprinkling of the people, the sacrifices, the sacred vessels, etc. Likewise in Christian times, water has been used for sacred purposes, as in baptism from the very time of Christ, and is a powerful sacramental from early in the Christian era.

Some ceremonies owe their institution to purely physical reasons or necessity, e.g. the lights used in the catacombs, which were retained by the Church for the mystical reason that they represent Christ, the Light of the World; others are founded on mystical or symbolic reasons, e.g. all the ceremonials at baptism which proceed the pouring of the water on the person to be baptized; many are founded on historical, natural and mystical reasons at the same time, e.g. the mixing of wine and water at Mass recalls to her mind what Christ did at the Last Supper, and represents the blood and water that flowed from his side on the cross, as well as the union of the faithful with Christ. Catholic ceremonies therefore are not superstitious practices, meaningless observances or relics of heathen and Jewish customs, but regulations of divine, apostolic, and ecclesiastical institution.

As water cleanses the body, so holy water, through the blessing of the Church and the good dispositions of those who use it, purifies the soul. And as the drinking of water is necessary for the health of the body,

so holy water promotes the health of the soul.

The use of water as a sacramental, apart from the administration of baptism, dates, at least in the East, from the second century. In the West the blessing of water can be traced to the period from the sixth to the eighth century. For the use of the faithful and blessing themselves, fountains and basins containing the sacred water were placed, first on the outside walls of churches, then inside the doors, that all might bless themselves as they entered the house of God. Catholics still dip their fingers in holy water and make the sign of the cross as they enter a church so that they may come into God's presence with pure souls.

Formally, the water was used only on entering the church to denote that purification was necessary before, but not after Mass. Today we use it both in entering and on leaving to gain the indulgence attached to making the sign of the cross with holy water. Catholics also keep holy water in their homes to use with reverence upon rising in the morning, going to bed at night, leaving or entering the house, or going from one room to another, etc.

There are four kinds of holy water: 1. Ordinary holy water. 2. Easter water. 3. Baptismal water. 4. Gregorian water.

The ordinary kind is usually blessed us before the principal parish Mass on Sunday, but may be blessed at any other time. Salt is mixed with the water, and both are given a

double blessing, one in exorcism to free them from all power of the evil one and the other a positive blessing to sanctify them with a good of souls. Salt, symbol of wisdom and of preservation from corruption, is fittingly mingled with water, the purifier.

Only ordinary water is used in the "Asperges" or sprinkling of the faithful before the main parish Mass, on Sunday; is kept in churches and homes for the use of the faithful, and is employed in most blessings, and the ceremonials of matrimony and Anointing of the Sick, and taking Holy Communion to the homes of the sick, and the services for the dead.

The blessing of the salt begins with a solemn exorcism: "I exorcize being, created substance of salt, by the living God... that you may be for the healing of soul and body to all those receiving you, and that there may be banished from the place in which you have been sprinkled every delusion and wickedness of the devil, and every unclean spirit..." The second prayer asked God to bless the salt that "it may be, unto all who take it, for health of mind and body; and that what so ever is touched or sprinkled with it may be free from all uncleanness..." If the salt has been blessed previously, this part of the ceremony is omitted.

The water is exorcized "for the banishment of every power of the enemy." The second prayer over the water is a beautiful exposition of the purposes for which the water is blessed. The prayer asked God that the water "may be endowed with divine