

Holy Water – Neglected Grace

May the Holy Spirit grant me grace to write worthily about the stupendous gift from God that holy water is. Amen.

For any Christian brothers and sisters, please bear with me, Scripture references are coming -eventually-, for this is part of your birthright as children of God and members of His church. I apologise in advance for any jargon that is incomprehensible to you, despite my attempts to reduce jargon.

For any Catholic brothers and sisters, it is past time that you knew what a gift of God holy water is, and how to use it with the intentionality of faith. For many of you it has been something culturally there, used mainly out of habit, and you've either never heard a good explanation, or its been decades since it was last mentioned in a homily.

For any other brothers and sisters, if you have faith in the goodness of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and believe He is willing to use such lowly means as blessed water to help the creatures He has made out of love, you are not excluded.

What is holy water?

It is water that has been set aside for special use; and blessed by a priest from any Rite (denomination) which has unbroken apostolic succession from the Apostles. Roman Catholic, Eastern Catholic Rites and Orthodox Rites legitimately claim this. The blessing over the water may be as simple as the gesture of the Sign of the Cross over the water, or according to one of the many approved prayers of blessing (see Appendix). Sometimes, but not always, there is an addition to the water of blessed salt.

What is the Sign of the Cross?

It can be made by anyone, either signed across the body or vertically signed over a crowd (eg by priest or bishop) or horizontally over something (palms for Palm Sunday, oil, holy pictures etc), or even traced on a forehead. The first part, 'In the name of the Father and of the Son', has an accompanying gesture going top to bottom; the second part, 'and of the Holy Spirit. Amen', has an accompanying gesture going across either right to left or left to right depending upon the tradition of your Rite. It invokes the holy Name of the Triune God, it reminds us that in this Name we are baptised, and it recalls to us the price paid by Jesus on the Cross to win us such salvation.

Why is a priest needed?

Because the priest when he speaks as a priest is both a minister of Almighty God and a representative of the whole Church (that's every member of the church in heaven, every member being purified in purgatory, and every member on earth). Thus when a priest uses the Sign of the Cross or an approved prayer of blessing (which always includes the Sign of the Cross), he is blessing the water both in the Name of God and in the name of the whole Church.

If you are beginning to think, gee, that's some heavy-duty prayer power: you're spot on. Holy water not only carries the blessing of God, but also the prayer power of the whole Church.

But holy water is not a sacrament; but a sacramental.

A sacrament does what it does, by the power of God it changes a person. A person is different pre and post Baptism; not a child of God before, a full child of God after. A person is different pre and post Marriage, unmarried before, married after. There are no degrees of being baptised or being married, you either are, or you aren't.

A sacramental is different because it requires faith to activate it, and the greater the intentional faith when using it, the greater the power of God released.

We see things used in a sacramental way in Scripture. On one of the training missions of the apostles while Jesus was still with them, they took oil with them to anoint people for healing. Mark 6:13. The woman with the haemorrhage had faith that if she but touched the clothes of Jesus she would be healed. Mark 5:25-34. Post-Pentecost faith was so great that even the shadow of St Peter when sought with faith by the sick obtained healing. Acts 5:14-15. Such was the faith of believers who surrounded Paul, that they grabbed anything he touched, (handkerchiefs and aprons), and whisked them off to the sick, and God rewarded their faith with healings and deliverances. Acts 19:11-12.

What can holy water accomplish when used with faith?

From St Faustina's Diary (601) Once, when one of our sisters became fatally ill and all the community was gathered together, there was also a priest there who gave the sister absolution. Suddenly, I saw many spirits of darkness. Then, forgetting that I was with the sisters, I seized the holy-water sprinkler and sprinkled the spirits, and they disappeared at once. However, when the sisters came to the refectory, Mother Superior remarked that I should not have sprinkled the sick sister in the presence of the priest, as this was his duty. I accepted the admonition in the spirit of penance, but holy water is indeed of great help to the dying.

(PDF available of St Faustina's diary:

https://benedictinesofdivinewill.org/uploads/3/4/3/2/34324596/st_faustina_kowalska_-_diary.pdf)

(My two cents worth: she did the right thing. God revealed what was going on, she acted. With death immanent there was no time for trying to tell the priest what was going on spiritually in the room, and then convincing him and getting him to act. When God reveals the presence of evil, He wants it gone! 1 John 3:8 *It was to undo all that the devil has done that the Son of God appeared.* We need to remember that as death approaches the fight over a soul for its eternal destination is intense, and to surround our dying loved ones with prayer, with holy things, have holy water at hand, and to obtain the best thing of all for them - the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.)

St Teresa of Avila used to say she knew by experience how powerful holy water is to put the Devil to flight. 'I used to drive him away,' she said, 'by the Sign of the Cross: but, it seems to me, it was only to return again; but when I used holy water also, he no longer dared to return.'

St Teresa of Avila writes: 'I have often found by experience that there is nothing from which the devils fly more quickly and return not again than from holy water. They also fly from a Cross, but they return again immediately. Certainly the power of holy water must be great; for my part, my soul feels particular comfort in taking it, and very generally a refreshment and interior delight which I cannot express and which comforts the soul.'

St Epiphanius writes that at Tiberius a man called Joseph, obtained from God a cure of a lunatic by taking water and making the Sign of the Cross over it while praying, 'In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, crucified, depart from this unhappy man, you infernal spirit, and let him be healed', before pouring the water over him.

What does the Church believe holy water used with faith can do?

Always it is a reminder of baptism, and the power of God at work in us due to baptism.
But it is also a prayer request for the forgiveness of sins,
a prayer request to dispel sickness,
a prayer request to protect from evil,
a prayer request to drive away evil spirits,
a prayer request for protection from danger,
and a prayer request to dispel the causes of sickness and plague too.

Here's one of those prayers. It is one of those used by a priest to ask God to transform water into holy water. It tells us a lot about what the Church has believed God does through holy water, based on many centuries of experience.
It is well worth pondering over on a regular basis.

Blessing of Holy Water

O God, for the salvation of mankind
You built Your greatest mysteries on this substance, water;
in Your kindness hear our prayers
and pour down the power of Your blessing + into this element,
made ready for many kinds of purification.
May this, Your creature, become an agent of divine grace in the service of Your mysteries,
to drive away evil spirits and dispel sickness,
so that everything in the homes and other buildings of the faithful
that is sprinkled with this water may be rid of all uncleanness and freed from every harm.
Let no breath of infection, no disease-bearing air remain in these places.
May the wiles of the lurking enemy provide of no avail.
Let whatever might menace the safety and peace of those who live here
be put to flight by the sprinkling of this water
so that the health obtained by calling upon Your holy name
may be made secure against all attack.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Impressive, isn't it?!

Regular uses for holy water are:

- As a reminder of baptism as we come into churches and as an acknowledgement that we need purification to come into the presence of God. Dipping fingers in the holy water and then making the Sign of the Cross is the way Roman Rite Catholics do it.
- To claim a place for God, and at the same time cleanse it of any lingering evil attached to it. The rites for blessing of new churches, new schools, new presbyteries, new parish offices, new graves all include splashing the holy water around.
- At home near the front door, or the door of a bedroom, for blessing as we go in and as we go out (Psalm 121:8, Deut 28:6). The Israelites touch the Shema as they come and go from their homes to remind them, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is the one God ...etc'. Deut 6:4 So in some sense, holy water is our version of the Shema.
- It is recommended that homes be blessed by a priest each year using holy water; this is often done during Eastertide.
- The annual blessing of the fishing fleet has prayers and the sprinkling of holy water.
- Asking to have your new car blessed, which is seeking God's blessing and protection upon its use, has prayers and usually holy water.
- At funerals the coffin of the deceased is sprinkled with holy water, as part of the other reminders of baptism (lighted Paschal candle, white cloth over the coffin)
- Holy Water is used in exorcism (priests appointed by a bishop) and in deliverance ministry.
- There's quite a long history of holy water being used to assist the purification process of the holy souls in purgatory.

'As the flowers, withered by the heat of the sun, are refreshed by the gentle shower of rain, so too Heaven's flowers burning in Purgatory, are refreshed by holy water.' (St. Theodatus).

St John Macias used to sprinkle holy water on the ground for the souls in purgatory while praying: 'By this holy water and by Your precious Blood, wash away all my sin, O Lord, and relieve the souls in purgatory,' and then make the Sign of the Cross.

On All Souls Day it is traditional to gather at the local cemetery and to pray for the dead.

Part of the rite of blessing of graves for All Souls Day includes this:

1746 While the following litany is sung or recited, the minister sprinkles the graves with holy water and, if desired, may also incense them.

The faith of the Church believes that sprinkling drops of holy water is also a powerful prayer for loved ones present or absent, living or dead.

If you can get your mind around the concept of holy water being liquid intercessory prayer, then these practices make sense, if they are done with faith in God who hears our prayers; however we make them. At all times our faith is in the God who has blessed the holy water, and heard the prayers of His Church, not in the holy water itself. Using holy water is begging His blessing, His protection, and His cleansing and purification.

If you have made it this far, you will now have enough knowledge to understand why the enemy of our souls wants to eradicate holy water.

That's why the notion of removing holy water from churches during Lent is not an idea that came from God. Lent is a time when people are intentionally fighting temptation and trying to eradicate bad habits. It's when they need the assistance that God gives through holy water more than ever!

Yes, the holy water is removed on Holy Thursday night after Holy Communion and returns during the Easter Vigil. But the Church sees the Holy Thursday – Good Friday – Easter Vigil as a single liturgy in 3 parts.

It is a source of extraordinary shame that during the Covid years our churches capitulated to fear of infection by removing holy water from the holy water fonts. Granted, some parishes with faith-filled priests managed to find ways to allow people to access holy water in a way considered safe.

How did it happen that there wasn't an outcry and a refusal to comply?
How did it happen that so few take seriously what the Church believes?
May God forgive us.

Re-read what the prayer says....

May this, Your creature, become an agent of divine grace in the service of Your mysteries,
to drive away evil spirits and dispel sickness,
so that everything in the homes and other buildings of the faithful
that is sprinkled with this water may be rid of all uncleanness and freed from every harm.
Let no breath of infection, no disease-bearing air remain in these places.
May the wiles of the lurking enemy provide of no avail.
Let whatever might menace the safety and peace of those who live here
be put to flight by the sprinkling of this water
so that the health obtained by calling upon Your holy name
may be made secure against all attack.

It means holy water is a weapon par-excellence against any kind of infection and plague when used with faith.

Read that again.

It means holy water is a weapon par-excellence against any kind of infection and plague when used with faith.

If we had faith, we would have been splashing it everywhere during Covid, and at the very least encouraging the Asperges (sprinkling rite) as part of the penitential rites at the start of the Eucharistic Liturgy.

But by and large we rolled over, leaders and people, and emptied the holy water fonts. We sadly put our faith in scraps of cloth over our faces, medical intervention and lockdown,

instead of in Almighty God and in His Almighty power to save. We didn't even have a clue what spiritual treasure we were giving up for the sake of fear.

Who wins if our holy water fonts are emptied? The evil one and his minions.

Just imagine how much lasting damage to the evil one's schemes could be done by a whole lot of ordinary believers splashing holy water about with faith.

Now read this prophetic word via Michele Stickells:

I saw an angel stirring the waters, then I hear, The angel is stirring up the waters of ancient wells, that have become dry and redundant. I see it's time that God wants to restore the wells that hold the ancient anointing, to bring forth the end time anointing that will bring revival. I also see mantles lying in the dust, waiting to be picked up; they also carry past and ancient anointings. The Holy Spirit is moving across the nations looking to see who will see what He is doing, and be ready to receive from past ancient anointings that have remained dormant and hidden for an appointed time, for it takes an ANCIENT ANOINTING TO RELEASE THE END TIME ANOINTING !!!

(Apologies, I can't find the original source on this, but it was released prior to 4 May 2018 when I first blogged about it, so that might be why I can no longer find it on the internet.)

Please, do not ever neglect the gift that God has given us through the faith-filled use of holy water.

May our holy water fonts in churches and elsewhere never ever ever be emptied again because our fear of sickness and our fear of government sanction is greater than our faith in Almighty God – He who is always in control and always bringing our greatest good out of every circumstance. Amen.

Appendix

There's many other prayers for this purpose. Here's a sample of ones in common use in the Roman Catholic Rite:

Prayer over Water 1/At Mass

God our Father, Your gift of water brings life and freshness to the earth;
it washes away our sins and brings us eternal life.
We ask You now to bless this water,
and to give us Your protection on this day
which You have made Your own. *(ie Sunday, the day of the Resurrection)*
Renew the living spring of Your life within us *(refer John 7:37-39 and John 4: 13-14)*
and protect us in spirit and body, that we may be free from sin
and come into Your presence to receive Your gift of salvation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer over Water 2/At Mass

Lord God Almighty, Creator of all life, of body and soul, *(refer Genesis 2:7)*
we ask You to bless + this water:
as we use it in faith, forgive our sins
and save us from all illness and the power of evil.
Lord, in Your mercy give us living water, *(refer John 7:37-39 and John 4:13-14)*
always springing up as a fountain of salvation:
free us, body and soul, from every danger,
and admit us to Your presence in purity of heart. *(refer Matthew 5:8)*
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer over Water 3/At Mass, Easter Season

(This prayer is for use during the Easter Season.)

Lord God Almighty, hear the prayers of Your people:
we celebrate our creation and redemption.
Hear our prayers and bless + this water
which gives fruitfulness to the fields, and refreshment and cleansing to man.
You chose water to show Your goodness when You led Your people to freedom
through the Red Sea and satisfied their thirst in the desert with water from the rock.
(Refer Exodus Ch 14, Exodus 17:1-7)
Water was the symbol used by the prophets to foretell Your new covenant with man.
(Refer Isaiah 55:1-11 and Ezekiel 36:16-28)
You made the water of Baptism holy by Christ's baptism in the Jordan:
(Refer Matt 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34)
by it You give us a new birth and renew us in holiness.
May this water remind us of our Baptism,
and let us share in the joy of all who have been baptized at Easter.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

The following prayer is used to call down God's grace on water at the Easter Vigil and as one of three prayer options for Baptisms, to make water into Baptismal water by God's grace.

Blessing of Baptismal Water/Easter Vigil/Baptisms

Father, You give us grace through sacramental signs, which tell us of the wonders of Your unseen power.

In Baptism we use Your gift of water,

which You have made a rich symbol of the grace You give us in this sacrament.

At the very dawn of creation Your Spirit breathed on the waters, making them the wellsprings of all holiness. *(refer Genesis 1:1-3)*

The waters of the great flood You made a sign of the waters of Baptism, that make an end of sin and a new beginning of goodness. *(Refer Genesis 6:9-9:17)*

Through the waters of the Red Sea You led Israel out of slavery, to be an image of God's holy people, set free from sin by Baptism. *(Refer Exodus Ch 14)*

In the waters of the Jordan Your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Spirit.

(Refer Matt 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34)

Your Son willed that water and blood should flow from His side as He hung upon the cross.

(Refer John 19:31-37)

After His resurrection He told His disciples: 'Go out and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' *(Refer Matt 28:16-20)*

Father, look now with love upon Your Church, and unseal for her the fountain of Baptism.

By the power of the Spirit give to the water of this font the grace of Your Son. *(Refer Phil 3:20-21)*

You created man in Your own likeness: cleanse him from sin in a new birth of innocence by water and the Spirit. *(Refer Genesis 1: 26-28)*

We ask You, Father, with Your Son to send the Holy Spirit upon the waters of this font.

May all who are buried with Christ in the death of Baptism rise also with Him to newness of life.

(Refer Romans 6:3-11)

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.