

LITURGICAL NOTES: HOLY WATER

Holy Mother Church, seeking to elevate the minds of her children through the use of natural substances, has employed water in her various rites and practices. For example: Since water is the most common of all substances upon earth, it is mixed with the wine at the offertory of the Mass to signify the union of all of the faithful with Christ their head.

It is however, the washing or purifying aspect of water, which is brought most often to the minds of the faithful. The priest begins a High Mass on Sundays with the intonation of the antiphon of the fiftieth psalm, *'Asperges me, Domine et mundabor; lavabis me et super nivem dealbabor...'* and he sprinkles the altar, himself, the servers and the congregation with holy water.

The sacrament of Baptism is essentially a washing; a purifying of the soul from the dross of original sin. Hence the essential element (i.e., the 'matter of baptism') is water. Similarly, to signify the purity, which he must have to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the priest washes his hands with water before the beginning of Mass as well as at the offertory.

The faithful also are encouraged to make use of water in this fashion. At the entrance to every Catholic Church there is a font filled with holy water. As one enters the church, one dips one's right hand into the font and, with holy water, one blesses oneself and makes the sign of the cross pronouncing these words: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen" Every catholic home should have many fonts and Catholics should always keep a supply of holy water in their homes. The use of holy water in this fashion dates from the very early times of the Church.

There are four types of water sanctified and used by the Church:

1) Baptismal Water: Baptismal water is a mixture of water and holy oils; it is blessed on Holy Saturday and again (if need be) on the Vigil of Pentecost. It is the normal licit matter for the sacrament of baptism (however in cases of an emergency ordinary water may be used).

2) Gregorian Water: Gregorian water is a mixture of water, wine, ashes and salt; it is used (by order of Pope Gregory IX) by bishops when churches are consecrated.

3) Easter Water: Easter water is blessed on Holy Saturday and then set aside for distribution to the faithful. (It is not mixed with the holy oils as is baptismal water.)

4) Holy Water: Holy water is a mixture of blessed and exorcised salt (to signify the preservation from sin for salt is a natural preservative) and blessed and exorcised water. Both elements are exorcised, say the Fathers of the Church, in order to liberate them from the evil spirits who, after the fall of our first parents, Adam & Eve, gained influence over these and all other inanimate objects intended for man's use. The priest mixes the salt with the water by sprinkling it thrice in the form of the cross and invoking the three Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity.

Holy water is the blessed water most commonly used by Catholics. The priest, by blessing and mixing the salt with the water, provides us with a sacramental, which, when properly used, remits venial sin. The faithful obtain an indulgence of one hundred days every time they use holy water. In order to gain the indulgence, three requirements must be met: the sign of the cross must be made with the holy water; the person must have contrition for his sins; the words accompanying the action must be said (i.e., "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen"). To omit any of these requirements forfeits the indulgence.

Holy water ought therefore to be used frequently and reverently by Catholics for it dispels demons and helps cleanse the soul.