

Holy water, and all sacramentals, are removed during the Triduum (Holy Thursday through the Easter Vigil when the new Easter water is blessed). In recent years some parishes have introduced a novelty which involves replacing holy water with sand or pebbles during the entire Lenten Season, ostensibly to call to mind Jesus' 40 Days in the desert. It is difficult to understand why any Church would condone the removal of such a powerful sacramental ~ one with the ability to remit venial sin, and to set demons fleeing. If your parish is one of these, respectfully speak with your pastor to encourage the return of holy water to its rightful place.

### Holy Water in the Catholic Home

Many Catholic homes place a **holy water font at the front door**. We bless ourselves each time we leave, asking that the Triune God guide our thoughts, words and deeds as we go out into the world. We ask for His protection and guidance in all that we do. When we return, we bless ourselves again, calling to mind the sanctity of the home. In time it becomes a deeply ingrained habit, and if one of your family rushes out without the blessing, another will inevitably call out, "Don't forget to bless yourself!"

Let us remember the **Holy Souls in Purgatory** each time we bless ourselves. One drop in their honor may be all that is needed to release a soul into Heaven.



The faithful may gain an **indulgence of 100 days<sup>2</sup>** each time the Sign of the Cross is made with holy water pronouncing the words and having contrition for sins. Sadly, those who pass through the Church doors, hastily dipping their fingers into the water to perform a gesture more reminiscent of swatting flies than of performing a solemn blessing, rob themselves

of a great grace. Choose instead to bless yourself with great care, perhaps adding the prayer, "**By this holy water and by Your Precious Blood, wash away all my sins, O Lord.**"

**Catholic Home and Garden**  
Your source for every important sacramental of the Catholic Church including holy water fonts, holy medals, holy cards, rosaries and hard to find scapulars.

Here are some additional uses for holy water in your daily lives as Catholics:

- **Bless the rooms of your home**, particularly bedrooms so that Satan might not enter. It is a beautiful Catholic tradition for parents to bless their children each night with a simple prayer, "Sleep in the peace of Jesus" - or in the Latino tradition "Que Te Bendigo" - that He May Bless you. Families with small children prone to night terrors sometimes place an inexpensive holy water font in their bedrooms for that purpose
- **Don't bless your home once and forget about it**, but make frequent use of holy water. Those who have suffered terribly with domestic unrest use holy water and the sign of the Cross in the corners of each room to good effect.
- **Bless your computers** with holy water and place a blessed St. Benedict medal on the monitor to call to mind the dangers of the internet. If you use a computer for work, holy water can help to sanctify the tool you use to earn a living.
- **Bless your family and business vehicles**, and consider joining the Sacred Heart Auto League.
- **Bless your children's bicycles, their schoolbooks**, and other objects as well, with a prayer that they might never stray from the Faith or be lead into temptation.
- **Use only a new, clean receptacle** for holy water, and take care not put it to any other use afterwards. Dispose of old holy water by pouring it into the ground in an area where it will not be underfoot.

*As is the case with any sacramental, holy water should be used piously, without superstitious notions attached to its use, but rather with the recognition that the benefits derived come directly through the Power of the Blessed Trinity and our Savior, Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> Objects that have been blessed should never be used for any profane purpose.*

<sup>1</sup> Encyclopedia of the Catholic Church 1913

<sup>2</sup> Sacramentary, 1956

<sup>3</sup> Sullivan, Rev. Paul. Externals of the Catholic Church

<sup>4</sup> Collectio Rituum, 1954

<sup>5</sup> Enchiridion of Indulgences 1968

<sup>6</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1667

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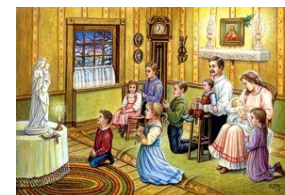
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## Catholic Home and Garden



*Preserving  
Catholic  
Traditions  
For  
Tomorrow's  
Faithful*

## Holy Water

An Important Sacramental  
for Every Catholic Home



**Holy water** is the most elementary sacramental available to Catholics everywhere. It is also one of the most powerful. Our lives as Catholics are infused with blessed water from the moment we receive the seal of the Holy Ghost at Baptism until our remains are blessed at the close of the Rite of Christian Burial before final interment.

**Catholic Home Traditions Faith Series**

The use of holy water in the home is a Catholic tradition that too few embrace. What a loss! Holy water has the power to remit venial sin. Saint John Vianney, in his Catechism on Confession, suggests that the moment a venial sin is perceived, “take some holy water with respect, do one of those good works to which the remission of venial sins is attached: an alms, a genuflection to the Blessed Sacrament, hearing a Mass.” The Church urges the frequent use of holy water in times of danger such as storms, fires, sickness, and when there is any type of conflict in the home or community.

### History of Holy Water Use

The use of holy water dates to the early Christian era, but prior to the 5<sup>th</sup> century, there is no specific documentation. Since Jewish law employed water for ritual purification, it is safe to assume that Christians adopted its use quite early. Jesus Himself was baptized with water.

One of the earliest liturgical documents by a 4th century Bishop refers to the blessing of holy water, invoking His Name upon it, and granting that it may have the powers to heal fevers and other maladies by drinking or anointing, and that all evil spirits shall be put to flight. St. Epiphanius blessed water with the Sign of the Cross and used it successfully to expel a demon. Later documents are filled with accounts of cures obtained by drinking water blessed in the Name of Jesus Christ.

In the 9th century, Pope Leo VI decreed that on each Sunday priests would bless holy water and deliver **Asperges**. He also encouraged the faithful to carry some away in a clean vessel to bless their homes, fields and cattle.<sup>1</sup>

### Four Species of Holy Water

The **most commonly used** holy water is found in vessels called stoups just inside the door of every Church. This water can be found in urns and is available for personal use by the faithful.

**Easter water** is blessed at the Vigil Mass on Holy Saturday with a ritual that involves dipping the Paschal candle three times. It is also available for personal use, although not many parishes encourage the faithful to utilize it. Not long ago, it was a pious custom for Catholic homes to send the young people of the family to Church to obtain this water as a sign of joyous renewal on Easter Sunday.

A procession throughout the house and gardens is led by the male head of the household, or if a family is so blessed, by a member of the clergy, invoking a blessing:

*Graciously hear us, Holy Lord, Almighty Father and Eternal God, that, even as You protected the homes of the Hebrew people leaving Egypt by means of the destroying angel; which homes were stained with the blood of a lamb, which prefigured our Pasch in which Christ was immolated; so may you in the same manner condescend to send your holy angel from heaven that he may guard, foster, protect, visit, and defend all the inhabitants of this dwelling. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.*<sup>2</sup>

Each of these holy waters may be used for Asperges as an alternative penitentiary rite. Sacred objects are also blessed with this holy water, including holy medals, rosaries, candles, as well as items meant for everyday use.

**Baptismal water**, like other holy water, is mixed with salt, and also has a small amount of the oil of the catechumens and chrism. It is found in a large font in an area of the Church referred to as the baptistery. Often located near the entrance to the Church, it reminds us of our own baptismal promises. *You should not attempt to bring this home with you.*

**Gregorian water**, the least common type, is used for the consecration of a new Church. It contains small amounts of wine, salt and ashes to be used by a bishop during the rituals.

**Water is also blessed in honor of the saints** for use at special occasions. On his Feast Day, it is a custom to bless a bit of wine with holy water, and drink to the love of St. John the Evangelist.

**Water from sacred sites** fully approved by the Catholic Church, such as Lourdes, Knock or Fatima, which are not generally blessed, may be added to holy water for additional benefit. Any type of water may be used for a private, emergency baptism.

### The Ritual for Blessing Holy Water

Prior to Vatican II, the blessing of holy water included exorcisms of the water and salt that is mixed with it to banish evil spirits. Tradition holds that Satan, in causing the fall of Saints Adam and Eve, gained dominion over inanimate objects used by man.<sup>3</sup> It is, therefore, necessary to exorcise the salt, the water, and the mixture of the two. The priest, in blessing the salt, invokes the power of the Living God, the True God, the Holy God, that whoever uses it may have health of soul and body; that where it is sprinkled every apparition, villainy, and turn of devilish deceit, and every unclean spirit, adjured by

Him Who will come to judge the living and the dead and the world by fire; that whoever is touched by it shall be sanctified, and freed from all uncleanness and all attacks of the powers of darkness.

The exorcism of the water calls upon the Most Holy Trinity to expel the spirits of evil from this world so that they might lose all influence over man, and further that no breath of infection or disease bearing air remain where it is used. Finally the priest implores God to bless the water so that through the invocation of His Holy Name, it will turn aside every attack of the unclean spirit and dispel terror of the poisonous serpent, in curing disease, and freeing us from pestilence and the wicked snares of the devil.<sup>4</sup>

Sadly, these beautiful prayers, which bestow a powerfully efficacious benefit to holy water, are no longer used in most modern churches. **St. Teresa of Avila** attested to the power of this holy water, and in her autobiography writes:

*"From long experience I have learned that there is nothing like holy water to put devils to flight and prevent them from coming back again. They also flee from the Cross, but return; so holy water must have great virtue."*

On the night of All Souls, the Saint was tormented by demons who interrupted her prayerful devotions. They were finally dispelled by a sprinkling of holy water.

As you bless yourself with the precious mixture of salt and water, you may wish to prayerfully keep in mind, as did St. John Chrysostom, the “effusion of Blood and Water flowing from the Master’s Side” opening a path to His Sacred Heart at the finality of His Passion, emptying Himself completely for our salvation.

