

Holy Water: Sacramental of the Church By George Melendez, Lecturer Good of the Order February 2023



Holy water is a sacramental. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1667) says, "Holy Mother Church has, moreover, instituted sacramentals. These are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church. By them men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy." (1670) "Sacramentals do not confer the grace of the Holy Spirit in the way that the sacraments do, but by the Church's prayer, they prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it."

Now, we all know how to use holy water: we dip our fingers in the font and bless ourselves as we enter and leave the Church. Ideally, we are supposed to recall our baptism and our baptismal promises, including our renunciation of Satan and rejection of sin.

But sometimes we forget the power of this sacramental, and take holy water for granted. When we use it routinely, this is an easy trap to fall into. But we should not let ourselves remain numb to the powerful effects of holy water. Holy water prepares us to receive the sacraments. With our sins forgiven, our baptism remembered, and with God's blessing upon us, we are ready to receive the grace of the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist.

We need to know that through a priest, holy water is blessed by God in virtue of Christ's baptism. The Catholic Church possesses enormous power in being able to impart sacramental grace, and holy water as a sacramental receives its power through the prayer and authority of the Church. The rite of blessing that a priest says over water to make it holy contains prayers of exorcism. It can banish demons, heal the sick, and send unwarranted grace upon us — yet most of the time we cross ourselves with this water without even thinking about how holy it really is. The grace received from holy water is of a twofold nature: the effects of grace for the body and the effects of grace for the soul.

Correspondingly, words used in two of the prayers in the rite of blessing are: "be to all who take it, salvation of soul and body," and in the second prayer, "let it be to all who take it, health of mind and body." Inasmuch as harmful influences, and sometimes sickness, originate largely with the devil, the prayer of the Church in the blessing of the water directs herself principally against the evil spirit as means of protection. As we learn from these same prayers of the Church, holy water is also a special remedy against ills of the body. This effect is contained in the second prayer pronounced over the water; that includes "health of mind and body."

Two questions arise, can Holy water be used to relieve someone from sickness? If it is used with firm faith and great confidence, will that person be cured without fail? This brings to mind a story

One morning a man walked into a Catholic church using a pair of crutches. He stopped in front of the holy water, splashed some of the water on each leg, then threw away his crutches. An altar boy witnessed the scene and ran into the rectory to tell the priest what he'd just seen. "Father, Father", the altar boy said to the priest. "This man just walked into the church on crutches, splashed holy water on both legs, then threw away his crutches". "Son, you have just witnessed a miracle", the priest said. "Tell me, where is this man now?" "He's lying flat on his back over by the holy water!", the altar boy replied.

If we wish to obtain great effects from the use of Holy Water, we must be well prepared. To be well prepared, we must above all be in the state of grace and have firm faith in, and submission to, Christ and His Holy Church.

By this it must be understood that even properly disposed, all the effects attached to the use of holy water may not be granted. But we know that graces will be accorded to whoever takes holy water in the proper disposition. How many graces or favors one obtains cannot be determined. Nor will one necessarily obtain the good or the grace that he seeks to obtain through holy water however well he may be prepared.

Was the man on crutches well prepared and properly disposed? Maybe, but there is only One who knows for sure. On the other hand, this man on crutches will invariably obtain some other grace that is equally as important to him, or more so.

Holy water is one of those beautiful gifts from God to keep us sanctified and holy in our daily lives and to keep the things we regularly use sanctified and holy. It can be used to bless yourself, your family, and/or the sick. You can bless your house, your workplace and your car, which is probably one of the most dangerous places where you spend a significant amount of time each day.

If we stop and think about what a generous gift holy water is, we will use it more frequently, thoughtfully, and gratefully!

**Mary Queen of the Knights, pray for us!
Blessed Michael J. McGivney, pray for us!**