

Thus the only varieties of holy water that directly concern the faithful are the water blessed on Holy Saturday, and that obtainable at any time at the church. They have the same value and the same uses, although the formula of blessing is different.

The Meaning of the Salt

Why does the Church use salt in holy water? Because of the symbolic meaning of salt and because it was a Jewish custom. Just as water is used for cleansing and for quenching fire, so salt is used to preserve from decay. Therefore the Church combines them in this sacramental, to express the various reasons why it is used – to help to wash away the stains of sin, to quench the fire of our passions, to preserve us from relapses into sin. Moreover, salt is regarded as a symbol of wisdom. Our Lord called His Apostles “the salt of the earth”, because by them the knowledge of the Gospel was to be spread over the world. The custom of using salt is a very ancient one, and can be traced to the second or third century.

The Liturgical Uses of Holy Water

Holy Water is used in the blessing of nearly everything which the Church wishes to sanctify. The *Ritual* contains many distinct blessings in which it is used. Besides the pouring of baptismal water which forms the ‘matter’ of the sacrament of Baptism, the sprinkling with holy water may be a part of the ceremonies of the visitation of the sick and of the administration of the Holy Eucharist to the sick; and it is employed also in funeral services and other rites for the dead.

The Asperges, or sprinkling of the

congregation on a Sunday, has a mystical meaning of its own. It renews the memory of Baptism, by which we have been sanctified and purified from sin; and it is intended also to drive away all distractions which might hinder us from the proper hearing of Mass. Remember that the holy water need not actually touch every person in the congregation. The whole assembled body of the faithful is blessed together, and all receive the benefit of the blessing, even though the holy water may not reach each individual.

How We Should Use It

We should slowly make the sign of the cross so that our entrance into the church is in God's name and what we do in the church will be under His authority and done with His help.

The above text has been prepared by the

Diocese of the United Kingdom

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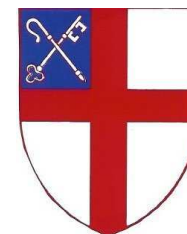
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**THE
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Holy water is

“water blessed by the priest with solemn prayer, to beg God's blessing on those who use it, and protection from the powers of darkness”.

A Symbol of Interior Cleansing

Water is the natural element for cleansing, and hence its use was common in almost every ancient faith, to denote purification. Among the Greeks and Romans the sprinkling of water, or ‘lustration’, was an important feature of religious ceremonies. Cities were purified by its use, in solemn processions. Fields were prepared for planting by being blessed with water. Armies setting out for war were put under the protection of the gods by being sprinkled in a similar manner. Among the Egyptians the use of holy water was even more common, the priests being required to bathe in it twice every day and twice every night, that they might thereby be sanctified for their religious duties. The Brahmins and others of the Orient, American Indians, and many other faiths have always attached great importance to ceremonial purification by means of water.

Among the Jews the sprinkling of the people, the sacrifices, the sacred vessels, etc., was directed by the regulations laid down by Moses in the books of Exodus and Leviticus; and it was undoubtedly from these practices of the Mosaic Law that our Church took many of the details of her ritual in regard to holy water.

When Was It Introduced?

The use of holy water in Catholic Churches goes back possibly to Apostolic times. There is



a tradition that St. Matthew recommended it as a means of attracting converts from Judaism by using a rite with which they were familiar in their former faith. We cannot be certain that he introduced it, but we know that it can be traced back nearly to the beginning of our religion. We find a detailed account of its use in the “Pontifical of Serapion”, in the fourth century, and the formula of blessing mentioned in it bears a considerable resemblance to that used today.

The Asperges

The sprinkling of the congregation, called the “Asperges”, goes back to the time of Pope Leo IV, in the ninth century, and possibly even further. The word Asperges is the Latin opening word of a verse of Psalm 51, which is recited as follows: “Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, O Lord, and I shall be cleansed; Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow”.

The custom of placing holy water at the door of the church for the use of the faithful is still more ancient. Among the Jews a ceremony of purification was required before entering the Temple to assist at the sacrifices, and this undoubtedly suggested the Catholic practice of using holy water at the church door. It is said to have been in vogue in the second century, and we know that the practice is a very ancient one.

In the Middle Ages it was customary to use holy water when entering the church, but not when leaving it – the idea being that purification was necessary before entering the house of God, but that after assisting at the Holy Sacrifice it was no longer needed. However, the general practice now is to take it both on entering and departing.

The Kinds of Holy Water

Sometimes a priest is asked: “Is Easter water the same as the other holy water?” The answer is that it has the same uses, but is blessed in a different manner. The first kind is the baptismal water, which is blessed in the font on Holy Saturday, and may also be blessed before any baptism by a priest or deacon. This water receives a special and solemn blessing. It is used for the administration of the sacrament of Baptism. (However, the sacrament is still valid if merely ordinary water is used.)

The most common kind is the holy water which is blessed by the priest for the sprinkling of the people before Mass, and is also placed at the doors of the church in a special font or bowl called a holy stoup. This also may be taken home and used for the blessing of persons and things.