

HOLY WATER

BY REV. HERM. FISCHER, S.V.D

[Authorised Translation from the German by Isabel Garahan]

INTRODUCTION

ONE day a pious brother, advanced in years, entered my study and said: "Father, I wish you would write something about holy water. It is such a good, simple medicine for body and soul; and so many people do not know this."

To this pious suggestion the present little book is due. Since that day I frequently found myself thinking of this "good, simple medicine for soul and body," and finally I conveyed my thoughts into writing. In this way the seed was sown. God grant it may bear fruit.

The subject then is "Holy Water," and its virtue. I hope the reader is not afraid of holy water; but if he is, then this little work has fallen into the right hands. At the same time it is intended for everybody. In more exact terms the subject matter is as follows: how the divine Power and the blessings of the Church are imparted by holy water; its preparation and its uses, the purposes it serves—all these can be helpful to the zealous, no less than to the indifferent Catholic. For the pious brother was right when he said: "Many do not know how good this simple medicine is."

1.—GOD'S POWER.

DOUBTLESS you are acquainted with the miracle of mercy which Jesus performed at the pool of Bethsaida. In one of the five porches to the pool lay a sick man who suffered from the palsy during thirty-eight years. For a long time he had waited in vain to be healed by the moving water. At certain times the water became agitated and whoever then first descended into it was healed of his infirmity.

The blind, the lame, the consumptive recovered their health in this water. But the palsied man had never succeeded in entering it at the right time.

One day the Saviour was passing through the porches in which a great crowd of sufferers were assembled. One of the poorest of these sad figures was the palsied man, and the heart of the divine Friend of men was filled with compassion for him. Jesus said to him: "Will you be made whole?" Ah, which one of these poor sufferers did not desire to be healed! The sick man looked up sadly at the kind Friend who put the question to him. He replied: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pond. For, whilst I am coming, another is going down before me."

In the pitiful complaint can be heard the silent request: "Will you help me, good Master? In all the years of my suffering no one has shown me so much sympathy. Help me and guide me down into the water."

But Jesus did not need to wait until the water moved; He did not need to help the sick man to the miraculous pond. In an earnest, sublime voice He spoke: "Take up thy bed and walk." And St. John, an eyewitness, relates: "Immediately the man was made whole: and he took up his bed and walked." What happiness it was for this man to be perfectly well again after such a long illness! But when later Jesus met him again, He said to him: "Thou art made whole: sin no more, lest some worst thing happen to thee."

This beautiful story of the Gospel contains much food for wholesome thought. Let us first consider the means by which God sends us His aid. From this miracle which our Saviour worked we see that God can help man in all his needs *directly*, without employing any means. He requires no medicines to heal the body, no Sacraments to save the soul. The omnipotent words of Jesus restored strength and activity to the man's palsied body and at the same time healed his soul.

But God seldom helps us so directly, so miraculously as in this case; usually He offers us His aid, in an ordinary way, through the *mediation* of His consecrated servants, the priests, and through the mediation of grace; that is the Sacraments, the Sacramentals and prayers. We have a beautiful example of such divine aid in the healing water of the pool of Bethsaida. The water was stirred by a mysterious power, and then it possessed the virtue of healing all

infirmities. How did this happen? Whence did it derive this wonderful power to heal? St. John tells us: "An angel of the Lord descended at certain times into the pond; and the water was moved. And he that went down first to the pond, after the motion of the water, was made whole." Thus, an angel was sent by God to bless the water. Through the angel God's power was imparted to the water which thus became an instrument of divine aid.

We can easily understand how all the sick in Palestine sought this miraculous water, how they crowded to the pond and had themselves carried down, how they longed for the water to move and with what zeal each tried to be the first to descend into the water to be healed by its power.

How good it would be for so many sick people, if there were such miraculous water today which would effect a certain cure of every illness! But the pond of Bethsaida was destroyed completely by the repeated devastations of Jerusalem. It was only in the year 1888 that its original site with the seven porches was discovered by chance; the site was exactly as it is described in the Gospel. But it no longer contains miraculous water, and the sick are no longer healed there as was the case formerly.

But, thank God, there is another holy water, one which is nearer to us and which possesses even greater healing power, I mean the holy water of the Catholic Church. The miraculous water at Bethsaida was only to be found in one place in the world and it possessed the power of healing at certain times only. Its effects were confined to healing the body, and that only in the case of the few who were fortunate in descending into the pond when the water was moved by the angel. But the water which God also causes to be blessed and given the power of imparting grace, through His messenger, the priest, is to be found in every Catholic church: it can be taken thence to the home, and in this way we have it with its virtue by us always. It retains its power to heal and helps not only the body, but protects and helps yet more our souls, in life and in death, for time and eternity. Now, the aim of this little book is to give an account of this precious holy water. But first we shall consider a little the power to bless which has been bestowed on the Catholic Church which offers us this holy water in God's Name.

11.—THE POWER OF THE CHURCH.

DURING HIS LIFE on earth the Saviour sent forth His apostles and disciples "and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases." The disciples returned from their first mission, filled with joy, and said: "Lord, the devils also are subject to us in Thy Name." But Jesus answered them: "Behold, I have given you power to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy and nothing shall hurt you . . . But in the same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Ghost, and said: 'I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to the little ones. Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight'" (Luke X).

Thus the Saviour, while He was still on earth, allowed His disciples to share, to some extent, in His divine power of bestowing grace. But when He took leave of the world He gave them His full power to save and to heal: "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you."

This is the great divine authorisation of the Catholic priesthood. Our Lord's work as Redeemer is to be continued in the world, and to this end His priests are endowed with the power which the Redeemer Himself received from His Father. Even as Jesus healed, the Catholic priest shall and can heal, save and bless. In the Name of Jesus, the priest shall and can break the power of evil spirits, that they may not harm us. He shall and can place us under the protection and blessing of God in all places and in all conditions of life. The Catholic church has received from her divine Founder the power, through her servants, the priests, of penetrating the whole human existence with divine inspiration and grace. We have the surest foundation for believing this.

The apostles and their immediate successors and assistants, by numerous miracles, soon revealed that God was with them, that through them He bestowed His blessing on men of good will. In the days of the miracle of Pentecost it was clear that Peter shared His divine Master's power of healing. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told that Peter met a cripple at the Golden gate who asked him for an alms. Peter said to him: "Silver and gold have I none, but what I have, I give thee: In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise, and walk." And, taking him by the right hand, he lifted him up and forthwith his feet and soles received strength. And he leaping up, stood, and walked, and went in with them into the temple." (Act III).

A few pages farther on we find, in the same book, frequent instances of such miracles, the apostles being mediators of the divine aid and divine grace: "By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people . . . They brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches that, when Peter came, his shadow, at the least, might overshadow any of them, and they might be delivered of their infirmities. And there came also together to Jerusalem a multitude out of the neighbouring cities, bringing sick persons, and such as were troubled with unclean spirits; who were all healed." (Acts V). And the following particular instance is related of St. Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles: "And God wrought by the hand of Paul more than common miracles. So that there were even brought from his body to the sick, handkerchiefs and aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the wicked spirits went out of them" (Acts xix). Thus we see that even the shadow, handkerchiefs and aprons of the apostles were mediators of divine assistance.

But it was not the actual vocation of the apostles and their successors, the Catholic priests, to perform miracles and heal the human body. They were called rather to *save souls*, to *make men holy*, to bring them nearer to God and unite them to Him for all Eternity. This distinction is very important.

The astonishing visible miracles which they worked were and should be no more than the divine testimony and sign of the much greater supernatural power of healing souls with which the servants of Christ are endowed. In what does this supernatural power consist? They offer the most holy sacrifice, and renew by this unbloody sacrifice, the redemption of the world by Christ at Golgotha. Infinite grace comes from the sacrifice on the altar where the Catholic priest in intercession elevates the immaculate Lamb of God. By administering the seven Sacraments he introduces souls into a wonderful world of grace. By holy Baptism man is born again, a child of God; the Sacrament of Confirmation seals his affiliation with God; the most Blessed Eucharist is his daily bread; the Sacrament of Penance renews or strengthens his affiliation with God; Marriage consecrates the family of God's children; by Extreme Unction they are blessed at the hour of death; by Holy Orders the children of God are raised to be administrators of the means of sanctification instituted by the Son of God. How wonderful are the gifts which the Catholic Church is empowered to bestow, through her priests!

Yet her power of imparting grace is not here exhausted. Between the principal stations of our life which are sanctified by the Sacraments numerous small, but none the less important concerns enter our lives daily, hourly, which can not well dispense with God's blessing. For these concerns the Catholic Church offers us her sacramentals, that is, exorcisms, consecrations, blessings, through which all that is harmful, especially the influence of the evil spirits, is warded off from us, and all that may help us rendered good and beneficial. To this end the Church uses the power bestowed upon her by Christ and follows the example He gave when He laid His hands on the little children and blessed them; when, looking up to Heaven, He blessed the loaves and fishes for the hungry multitudes. In the same way the Catholic Church blesses mothers and children, food and drink, dwellings, clothing, pasture and corn, domestic animals, barns, stables, workshops, machines and innumerable other things. She consecrates her churches and all that is intended for God's service; she consecrates cemeteries and blesses the graves of our dear ones, oil, candles, herbs, palms, crucifixes, rosaries, scapulars, medals, and especially *holy water* for the manifold, pious use of body and soul.

The Catholic Church possesses enormous power of imparting grace; she surrounds her faithful children with innumerable spiritual helps and the divine protection. If but few receive these abundant graces, the cause lies in the want of a lively faith—a want from which our time suffers so much. That which was said of the inhabitants of Nazareth is only too true today: "Because of their little faith Jesus did not work many miracles." Thus, because many are weak, cold and ungenerous in their faith, God cannot expend on them his supernatural graces, even through His priests. We read in the Gospel that the Saviour has always demanded a lively faith as a condition for His miraculous aid. The best prayer of petition is a lively, childlike faith.

Therefore let us increase our faith by making frequent acts of faith and by a life of strong faith. Let us look upon all the things of religion with believing eyes, and let us use them with pious zeal and a holy desire for divine aid. In this way also we should look upon holy water which is the source of abundant graces.

111.—THE SACRED SOURCE.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT we read that God sent Moses to lead the chosen people: "Take in thy hand the rod

and strike the rock and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did as the Lord commanded him. A fresh source sprang up and gave forth abundant water with which the thirsty multitude were refreshed.

Now, in the new Covenant the Catholic Church holds the place of Moses. She has received the command to lead the chosen people of the kingdom of Jesus Christ and to open to them the source of grace—in the words of St. Paul, Jesus Christ Himself—is *Prayer*. By prayer the Church performs her work of redeeming souls; for it is extremely efficacious; of her prayer may be said, in the words of Our Saviour: “Ask and you shall receive!” By her powerful prayer also the Church sanctions holy water.

Holy water is composed of two elements, water and salt. Very beautiful are the prayers, and deeply significant the ceremonies with which the priest converts both into a mediation of divine grace; the evil spirits are exorcised so that the water may be efficacious in warding off their evil influence; and it is consecrated so that it may become a mediator of divine grace.

The priest, wearing a purple stole, blesses the holy water in the following manner:

Our help in the Name of the Lord,
Who made heaven and earth.

[The Priest exorcises the salt].

I exorcise thee, creature of salt, by the living ✠God, by the true ✠God, by the holy ✠God, by that God who ordered thee to be put by Eliseus the prophet into the water, that the barrenness of the water might be healed; that thou mayest become exorcised salt for the salvation of those that believe; and that thou mayest be for the healing of soul and body to all those receiving thee, and that there may be banished from the place in which thou hast been sprinkled every kind of hallucination and wickedness, or wile of devilish deceit, and every unclean spirit, adjured in the name of Him who will come to judge the living and the dead, and the world by fire. Amen.

LET US PRAY.

O Almighty and eternal God, we humbly implore Thine infinite mercy, that this creature of salt which Thou hast bestowed for the use of mankind may be blessed ✠and sanctified ✠through Thy mercy, that it may make for health of mind and body to all who partake of it; and that what ever is touched or sprinkled with it may be freed from all uncleanness, and from the assaults of the evil spirit. Through Our Lord Jesus Christ Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee for ever and ever. Amen.

[He then exorcises the water.]

I exorcise thee, creature of water, in the Name of God ✠the Father Almighty, and in the name of Jesus ✠Christ His Son our Lord, and in the power of the Holy ✠Spirit, that thou mayest be made exorcised water for the banishment of every power of the enemy, and that thou mayest be able to uproot and cast out that enemy himself, together with his rebel angels: by the power of the same Jesus Christ Our Lord, Who will come to judge the living and the dead, and the world by fire. Amen.

LET US PRAY.

O God, who for the salvation of mankind has appointed water to be the foundation of Thy greatest Sacraments, graciously hear our prayers, and fill this element, which has in manifold ways been purified, with Thy power and blessing ✠ so that this creature of Thine, for use in Thy mysteries, may be endowed with divine grace to drive away devils and to cast out diseases; that whatever in the houses or possessions of the faithful may be sprinkled by this water may be freed from everything unclean and delivered from what is hurtful. Let no spirit of pestilence or baleful breath abide therein; let all the snares of the enemy who lieth in wait be driven forth; and let everything that threatens the safety or peace of the dwellers therein be banished by the sprinkling of this water; so that the health which they seek by calling upon Thy holy Name may be guarded from all assault. Through Our Lord.....

[The Priest puts blessed salt thrice into the water crosswise, Saying:]

Let salt and water mingle together in the name of the Father ✠ and of the Son ✠, and of the Holy✠Ghost. Amen.

The Lord be with you.

And with thy spirit.

LET US PRAY.

O God, the giver of invincible strength, and King of irresistible power, ever wonderful in triumph, who holdest in check the power of the enemy, who overcomest the fury of raging enemies, who by Thy might gainest the victory over all their guile; we humbly pray and beseech Thee, O Lord, to look upon this Thy creation of salt and water, to bless it in Thy mercy and hallow it with the dew of Thy loving kindness: that wherever it be sprinkled and Thy holy Name shall be invoked in prayer, every assault of the unclean spirit may be baffled, all fear of the venomous serpent cast out, and the presence of the Holy Spirit everywhere vouchsafed to us who entreat Thy mercy. Through Our Lord . . . in the unity of the same Holy Ghost

These are the sublime prayers and ceremonies with which the Priest in obedience to the holy Church blesses the holy water for the pious use of the faithful.

IV.—THE PROFOUND AND BEAUTIFUL SIGNIFICANCE OF HOLY WATER.

THE SAVIOUR taught by means of parables and similes in order to render the divine truths clearer and more easily understood by His audience. He used the same method of teaching in the institution of His means of grace which in their outward signs are mainly symbolic of the effects which they produce in the soul. Thus the washing in Baptism is symbolic of cleansing the soul of original sin; the anointing with Chrism at Confirmation is symbolic of fortifying the soul to fight for the Faith; the bread under the form of which the Blessed Eucharist is received is a symbol of food for the soul, and so on. In the same way holy water is a beautiful, profound symbol of its significance and its effects on body and soul.

Pure water is *clear* and *transparent*. In it the heavens are reflected, the light of the sun, and the light of the stars. Similarly our souls should radiate purity that in them may be clearly reflected the heavens of faith, the sun of divine charity, and the starlight of the Christian virtues.

Water *cleanses* and *purifies*. Holy water reminds us that our souls have been washed and made pure by the water of holy Baptism, and thereby we have been received into the community of the children of God. Every time we sign our foreheads with holy water, we are reminded of our holy baptismal vows and of the obligation then undertaken, to keep our souls pure. So too holy water is a constant exhortation to purge our hearts from sin by penance and reparation. For this reason pious Christians when taking holy water, pray: "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."

Water *quenches our thirst and refreshes* us, it revives and fructifies the earth, falling from the heavens as rain or dew, Holy water is a symbol of the dew of divine grace which refreshes our souls and fructifies our work, so that it becomes a service of God.

Water *cools* the hot air and *extinguishes* fire. Holy water should remind us that we must cool the ardour of our passions and extinguish the fire of inordinate desires.

The *salt* which is mixed with the water during the blessing bears a threefold symbolic meaning. In the first place, *salt preserves from corruption*. Our souls should be preserved from the corruption of sin, especially grievous sin and kept fresh and pure throughout our lives as children of God. Again, salt has always been regarded as a *symbol of wisdom*. But Christian wisdom leads to a wholesome fear of God and thence to a love of God. Finally, salt imparts an *agreeable taste* to food to which it is added; and so, too, virtue makes our souls pleasing to God.

Finally, let us consider the many signs of the *cross* which the priest makes over the elements when blessing the holy water and mixing the salt with it; and how we ourselves make the sign of the cross when we take holy water. The meaning of this is that all the graces and helps which we receive from God have been merited for us by the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ on the Cross and flow to us from this source.

From all this we see how inspiring holy water is. It is true that only the Catholic who is imbued with holy faith can understand these truths and receive the grace that is derived from its use. Only the believing Catholic can have a right understanding of the beneficial operation of holy water on body and soul.

V.—EFFECTS OF HOLY WATER.

IF WE would know the effects of using holy water and its advantages, we need only to read the prayers said by the priest during the blessing, according to which we are offered the following helps:

1. *Protection against the evil spirit, the devil.* We cannot fail to be impressed by the urgent supplication of the Church, during the blessing of holy water, for protection from the infernal enemy, from his cunning and wickedness. This petition recurs in each of the five prayers. For the Catholic Church is deeply convinced that Satan brought on man sin and its sad consequences, and that he never ceases to harm him when he can. As he once made use of the fruit of the tree in Paradise to rob our first parents of God's friendship, he continues to use for our destruction the creatures intended for our use. Therefore the Church, by exorcising, prays to God that the devil and his evil influence may give way before holy water and everything with which it is sprinkled.

How terrible is the power of Satan we see from the accounts given in the Gospel of the possessed who were liberated by the Saviour or his apostles. St. Paul warns us: "The devil goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist ye, strong in faith." Among the many means of resisting the devil, holy water holds a very special place, since it has been specially blessed that it may break the power and wickedness of Satan. Later, in an account of St. Teresa, we shall learn something of the extraordinary power which holy water has against the snares of the devil.

2. *Protection from Storms and the Damage caused by them.* When holy water is being blessed, the Church prays God that wherever holy water is sprinkled, disaster caused by storms may be warded off.

3. *Well-being of the Body.* The Church prays that holy water may protect us from illness, especially infectious diseases.

4. Holy water brings us help and grace for *the sanctification of our souls.* This is the first aim of all supernatural means of grace. When we sprinkle ourselves devoutly with holy water, the merits of the precious Blood of Jesus are applied to our souls.

5. *Pardon for Venial Sins and the remittance of the temporal punishment due to sin* are obtained when we use holy water devoutly and make an act of contrition. This is true in the case of all sacramentals. But there is scarcely any one which we can use for this purpose so easily and conveniently or so frequently as holy water. How many graces we can obtain for our souls, and what an easy way of going through our Purgatory here on earth by frequent devout use of this means of grace!

6. By using holy water we obtain the *assistance of the Holy Ghost*, for the Church prays that through the power of holy water, the Holy Ghost may be always present by us. The evil spirit will be expelled; but the divine Spirit, will enter our hearts and our dwellings when we sanctify them by using holy water.

7. Finally, by holy water *consolation and mitigation of punishment* can be obtained for the holy souls. We know this from the beautiful ceremonies observed by the Church at the burial of her children. The body, coffin and grave are sprinkled with holy water. The body being blessed, shall rest in consecrated ground; and by God's mercy the soul shall be given consolation and mitigation 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*).

It is *through the power of the prayers of the Church* that holy water possesses the effects enumerated above. Prayer, above all the prayer of the Church, can obtain the divine assistance even for one utterly undeserving. Therefore holy water will not be used in vain even in the case of one who is in the state of mortal sin. It can always bring him predisposing grace to return to God's friendship, protection of the body and other assistance. But its power is far greater when used by those in the state of grace and applied with devout intention. The words spoken by the Redeemer when the apostles desired peace may be applied to the Church's blessing: "And when you come into the house, salute it, saying, 'Peace be to this house!' And if that house be worthy, your peace shall come upon it" (Matt.

xx). Similarly when holy water is used devoutly, the numerous blessings pronounced by the Church at the blessing of the holy water, will be received by the children of God, by Catholics, who are in the state of sanctifying grace.

The blessings obtained from a devout use of holy water are indeed manifold. But how should it be applied? Again, we should imitate the example of the holy Church.

VI.—THE EXAMPLE OF THE CHURCH.

THE USE of holy water in the Catholic Church is a time-honoured custom. In the first centuries it was usual to sprinkle the faithful with holy water. St. Chrysostom relates that the faithful used to take holy water to their houses and keep it throughout the year.

And the ecclesiastical writers of the fourth century make mention of a basin or other receptacle containing holy water which stood at the entrance of the churches for the use of the faithful. Since that time more and more numerous accounts have been given of the manifold, devout use of holy water. And so it has remained to the present day.

When you enter the house of God, the Church invites you to take holy water from the font which is placed at the door. You take it and make the sign of the holy cross.

This is to remind you to approach the throne of the Most High with purified soul.

At solemn High Mass on Sundays, you notice that the priest, before beginning the holy sacrifice, first sprinkles the congregation with holy water, the following verse being sung: “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.” In Paschal time the following is sung: “I see water flowing from the right side of the temple, Alleluia; and all to whom that water came were saved, and they shall say: ‘Alleluia, Alleluia!’” By this blessing the Church desires to prepare her children and make them worthy to assist in a becoming and meritorious manner at the most holy sacrifice of the New Covenant. In some places this ceremony of sprinkling the faithful with holy water takes place before every holy Mass and, moreover, at evening devotions.

The care of the holy Church for her children extends even beyond death. We have already mentioned that at the burial service the coffin and the grave are sprinkled with holy water. The Church desires that her children shall rest in holy ground. Therefore cemeteries are consecrated. In many churchyards holy water fonts stand by the graves, which are sprinkled by the relatives, especially on Sundays. By this beautiful custom the Church reminds us that underneath rests the body of one who through Baptism was born again and that, notwithstanding decay and death, it will rise again to everlasting life and glorification. At the same time we are exhorted to remember the soul that has departed, and to comfort and help it in Purgatory by the sacramental of holy water. Like all the sacramentals, holy water has the power of imparting graces; we can apply these graces to the souls in Purgatory.

Again, if one of her children is sick, the Church sends the priest to him with Sacrament, prayer and consolation. As soon as the priest enters the sick room, he sprinkles the patient, those present, and the room with holy water, while he says the following beautiful prayer: “. . . Almighty Father, Eternal God, vouchsafe to send Thy holy Angel from Heaven to guard, cherish, protect, visit, and defend all that dwell in this house.”

The Church uses holy water very frequently in the numerous blessings and consecrations undertaken by her. The ritual (*Handbook of Ecclesiastical Ceremonies*) contains a supplement of over a hundred different consecrations and blessings. In almost every case, holy water is applied. After the sign of the cross, holy water is used by the Church more frequently than any other sacramental.

But the Church not alone uses it frequently, but she desires the faithful to do likewise. Therefore she gives the priest unlimited power to bless holy water for the use of the faithful. In many churches it is blessed every Sunday. Further, the Church allows, nay, wishes that Catholics should take holy water to their homes and keep it for private use. In this way the Christian family is enabled to experience the operation of holy water in their souls as often as desired.

Is this observed in your home?

VII.—IMITATION OF OUR HOLY MOTHER, THE CHURCH.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS your spiritual mother. Through the Sacrament of holy Baptism she has given you

new birth; she nourishes your soul with the Word of God, Christian doctrine, the Sacraments and numerous other means of grace; she leads you with sure hand along the path of life, remains faithfully by you in every situation that occurs, helping you and comforting you at death, and after death she is solicitous for your eternal happiness. Therefore you should cling loyally to this Mother whose prudent judgment and example should be more to you than the superficial talk of Catholics who call themselves “modern,” but who are cold and lacking in fervour in their faith. *Sentire cum ecclesia*, feel with the Church, judge and act in the spirit of the Church. This is the mark of the true Catholic. In this way, too, you should look upon holy water. The Catholic who regards it with contempt, who is ashamed to use it, who would not wish to be caught with a holy water font in his home, is wanting either in Catholic understanding or in the true Catholic spirit.

In all the things of religion, such as the use of holy water, hold firmly to the golden rule: I will imitate my mother, the Catholic Church.

Then see to it that you *always have holy water in your* home. This should be a principal concern of the Christian mother, who in the sanctuary of the family holds, as it were, the office of priestess. Have holy water fonts in all the bedrooms and in the living room of your family. Set the good example yourself by frequently making the sign of the cross with holy water. Encourage others in your home to do the same.

Teach your children always to take holy water before going to sleep, and to sprinkle their beds with a few drops; also to bless themselves with it when they rise in the morning and before going to school. Bless your children yourself with holy water, especially your youngest child when you have attended to him in the morning; sprinkle it on his little cot and his clothing, and from time to time place a little in his bath.

When anyone is ill it is essential to have holy water by the bedside. The patient should be encouraged often to bless himself with it. Bless his medicine with it also. One day Blessed Anna Catherine Emmerich when suffering from fever was given a glass of fresh water. Brentano, who rendered her this service, touched the rim of the glass with holy water. As soon as the patient’s lips touched the glass, she felt refreshed and exclaimed: “This is wine—from the garden of the Church.” In her suffering condition this holy woman felt great alleviation in the use of holy water and in the priest’s blessing. In the following chapter you will learn the opinion which St. Teresa held of holy water and its healing power.

From time to time, and at least once a year, you should sprinkle all the rooms in the house with holy water, using a palm branch for the purpose; also cellar, storeroom and granary. Similarly with workshops, stables and barns, machines and cowsheds, garden and fields. Do not think this is a desecration. As we are permitted to pray for all these material things, so too we may invoke God’s protection on them through the sacramentals of the Church. Nor need you have any scruple in putting holy water in the food of sick animals. The Church has herself instituted formulae for blessing with holy water, our food and drink, animals—their food and stables; fields (to protect them from all kinds of noxious insects); machines, telegraph apparatus, railways, wells, furnaces, tile works, and so on. The whole creation is intended for man’s use, to serve his welfare, corporal and spiritual, temporal and eternal. And to this end the Church pronounces her blessing given in God’s Name.

As has been said above, blessing with holy water may be applied to the *souls in Purgatory*. The Church herself gives us the example which we should follow. It can be done by sprinkling a few drops of holy water with the pious intention of alleviating and refreshing the suffering souls. An easy way of showing that we are thinking of our dear ones and of helping them!

VIII.—HOW ST. TERESA VALUED HOLY WATER.

If you wish to inquire the value of some precious jewel or gold ornament, you do not ask the next best man in the street, a hawker or the baker’s boy. You take it to an expert, a jeweller or a goldsmith. Similarly you do not go to ignorant or indifferent Catholics, to the scoffer or the recreant, to inquire the value of the things of religion. In this case, also, you have to go to experts. Where are these to be found? They are God’s saints. These have a true, expert knowledge and large experience of things appertaining to religion. They possess supernatural knowledge, minds rendered keen by faith and a delicate sense of the things of God. These can give us a true idea of the value of holy water, and many have given testimony to its efficacy.

Space does not allow mention of all these here, but we shall give that of St. Teresa, one of the greatest women

saints of all times, one in whom were combined perfection in virtue and an extraordinary keenness of intellect and wisdom.

One of St. Teresa's companions in religion, the reverend Sister Anna of Jesus, relates the following: "Our holy mother (Teresa) never permitted us to travel without holy water. Seeing on several occasions that we had forgotten to take some with us, she had two little gourd bottles fastened to our girdles. It almost always happened that we had to bring one or other to be replenished from hers, while she would remark: ' You do not know how refreshing it feels to be sprinkled with holy water. What an advantage to be able to apply to ourselves so easily the Sacred Blood of Jesus Christ!' Each time that we prayed during the journey we had to take holy water." (*Letters of St. Teresa*).

Regarding the power of holy water over Satan, St. Teresa relates the following from her own experience: " One time while I was in the oratory, the devil appeared in a horrible shape on my left. While he was speaking to me I noticed his horrible mouth. A large flame of fire, very bright and without shadow, surrounded his body. In a terrible voice he told me I had escaped from his hands, but he would obtain possession of me again. I was terribly afraid, and I made the sign of the cross as well as I could. Then he disappeared, but came back twice. I did not know what to do until at last it occurred to me to sprinkle holy water towards the spot where he stood. He disappeared and did not return."

On another occasion, during an illness, she was again tormented by the devil, this time in the form of a negro. She relates: "The worst was the restlessness of mind I felt which was so intense that I could not recover peace in any way. I did not wish the sisters to notice what was happening lest they should be frightened, and so I did not venture to ask for holy water. I have often experienced that nothing was so effective as holy water for driving away evil spirits finally. They flee before the cross, but return again. Therefore the power of holy water must indeed be great. I have myself felt an extraordinary consolation when I have used it. It is certain that I have felt a great joy and inner peace which I cannot describe, a joy with which my soul was quite refreshed. This is not merely an effect of the imagination, nor a rare occurrence. I have experienced it frequently and paid special attention to it. *On these occasions I feel like one who, suffering intense thirst, takes a glass of water and is quite refreshed. From this we can see how important everything instituted by the Church is; it comforts me to see the great power which her blessing imparts to water, so great is the difference between blessed and unblessed water.* As the evil spirit continued to torment me, I told the sisters at length that I should like some holy water, only they must not laugh at me. They brought it and sprinkled me with it, but in vain. Then I sprinkled it in the direction of the hideous black figure and he disappeared immediately.

The saint wrote to her brother who was tormented by great fear that she attributed his suffering to the evil spirit, and she advised him as follows: Always have holy water near you; for there is nothing the devil fears more than this. I have found this remedy of great service to me in many cases when I was tortured, not only by fear, but in other ways. I am telling this to you alone. But unless the holy water reaches him he will not flee; therefore you must sprinkle it around."

Her brother, asking her to enlighten him further, she wrote back: "I have no other foundation for what I have said regarding the power of holy water except my own experience. I have discussed the matter with learned men and met with no disagreement. For us it is enough that, as they said, the Church sanctions the use of holy water."

This is the opinion of a true expert concerning the value of holy water and its power. This testimony of the great enlightened saint has its true foundation in the example of the holy Church. St. Teresa merely states what the Catholic Church teaches in her prayers and practice. The Church was St. Teresa's guide; it should also be ours. We should regard with her eyes all ecclesiastical means of grace, and hence also the sacramentals, which include holy water; we should treasure them with her judgment and love them as she loved them. How happy is the Catholic who always feels that he is a child of the Church, always looking on her as his mother, always in harmony with her views! He will always be preserved from error, doubt and restlessness, and will share abundantly in the graces imparted by the Church.

Let us be even such good and happy children of the Catholic Church. Let us prove this by frequent, devout use of holy water. Once again, let our watchword be: " I will imitate my mother—the Catholic Church."

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