

Faith in Five – Adults
Sacramentals
September 30, 2022



1. **What is a sacramental?** A sacramental is an outward sign instituted **by the Church** to give God's grace (CCC, 1670). This differs from a sacrament, which is an outward sign instituted **by Christ** to give God's grace. Sacramentals prepare us to receive the fruit of the sacraments and sanctify different circumstances of life (CCC, 1679).

2. According to the CCC 1669, "sacramentals derive from the baptismal priesthood: every baptized person is called to be a "blessing" and to bless. The root of sacramental use is the idea of blessing. We can bless our food, our children, Advent wreaths, but ordained ministers administer blessings that concern ecclesial and sacramental life. Their blessing makes the object sacramental.



3. The blessing of a sacramental by the ordained involve certain actions when they are blessed: laying on of hands, sign of the cross and sprinkling of holy water. A blessed, sacramental object is meant for holy use and meant to serve the will of God through faith and devotion. Sacramentals should not be thought of as magic, guarantees of favor, contracts, investments, superstition or good luck charms.

(Image Source: *The Sacramentals of the Church*, Fr. Lovasik, SVD, [book cover])

4. **Scriptures describing the use of sacramentals:**

a. Naaman went to Elisha for a cure for his leprosy. Elisha told him, "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will heal, and you will be clean" (2 Kings 5:10).

b. When the man came in contact with the bones of Elisha, he came back to life and rose to his feet (2 Kings 13:20-21).

c. Jesus healed the blind man using mud (John 9:6-12).

d. The woman with hemorrhages was healed by touching Jesus' garment (Luke 8:44).

e. Face cloths or aprons that had touched the skin of Paul and were applied to the sick, diseases were healed, and evil spirits released (Acts 19:11-12).

f. Holy Water – Numbers 5:17 states, "In an earthen vessel [the priest] shall take holy water, as well as some dust from the floor of the tabernacle and put it in the water." Water was also used for ceremonial cleansing (Psalm 16:4).

5. **Among sacramentals, blessings are the most important** (persons, meals, objects, places). Every blessing includes thanksgiving to God for the gift; the Church invokes the name of Jesus and makes the sign of the cross (CCC, 1671). **The other types of sacramentals are,**

a. **Exorcisms:** The Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and withdrawn from his dominion (CCC, 1673). A simple form of exorcism occurs during the sacrament of Baptism, where the priest invokes protection in Jesus' Name against the evil one. A solemn exorcism or

major exorcism can only be done by a priest with the permission of the bishop. This is a deeply serious act which involves following strict rules set by the Church. The expulsion of credible demons is not to be treated lightly.

b. **Rubrics and Prayers** – Rubrics and prayers are all sacramentals, such as the bowing of the head at the holy name of Jesus, the sign of the cross, and kneeling. All these things should be done or used deliberately and devoutly since they were intentionally instituted by the church to aid us in attaining a deep love of God.

- **Indulgences** - An indulgence is merely the remission of all, or part of the penance required for a sin already absolved in confession. They typically involve saying certain prayers, visiting certain holy sites, or other actions. An indulgence does not forgive sins. It only reduces the penance. According to the Catechism, "An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin. The faithful can gain indulgences for themselves or apply them to the dead."

- **Pilgrimages** - From ancient times, certain places were regarded as holy, consecrated by the actions of God. Pilgrimage is an act of purposeful and prayerful travel where one seeks spiritual renewal or recommitment to the faith. Indulgences are usually attached to visiting a church, shrine, or holy site.

c. **Articles of devotion and piety** - Examples of sacramental objects used in liturgy include the crucifix, Holy Oils, bells, incense, candles, statues, palm leaves and holy water. Some of these items can be found and used in the home for personal use. Personal articles of devotion and piety to be discussed in next week's post.

6. **Examples of liturgical sacramentals:**

a. **Oils** - The Church makes use of three holy oils: the oil of the sick, the oil of the catechumens and the holy chrism oil. The first two are blessed, and the bishop consecrates the third, ordinarily during the annual Chrism Mass. Each has a distinctive purpose in the Church. They are a holy, precious gift from God to the Church, signifying cleansing and strengthening, healing and comfort, and the life-giving grace of the Holy Spirit.

b. **Bells** – during Mass, ringing bells are used to draw attention to the solemnity of certain moments of the epiclesis (the calling down of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine). Historically, when the priest had his back to the congregation (and the assembly could not tell what was going on), bells alerted the faithful when the consecration took place. At the consecration, bells announce and emphasize the magnitude of the presence of Christ. We are called to worship and adore Him and partake of His Body and Blood.

Church bells rung outside of Mass were used to call the faithful to worship; a reminder to make time for prayer or to mark the time of day; and on special occasions, to honor or rejoice in God's goodness.

c. **Incense** - Christians use incense as a symbol of sacrifice and prayer, a means of sanctifying and purifying. Our worship on earth becomes connected with the worship of heaven, as our prayers rise up to God as a sweet perfume. The smell of incense draws us into a more prayerful experience.

d. **Candles** - Light from lamps and candles is a symbol of light of the Resurrection of Jesus, dispelling darkness and death. Votive candles serve as an aid to prayer. In front of chapels or statues of the Madonna or the Saints they are often lit as a symbol of faith and hope and a visual presence of a prayer made. Altar candles play an important role in the liturgy. Candlelight banishes darkness and reminds of the greatness and magnificence of the Love of God.

e. **Holy Water** – with the sign of the cross, we renew our commitment to Christ, to Whom we belong since the moment we are baptized. As baptism is the sacrament of salvation, being sprinkled with holy water brings us into direct contact with Jesus. Holy water is a means of sanctification, of dispelling evil and provides protection during spiritual warfare.

7. Since sacramentals are consecrated materials they should be used with, cared for and disposed of with respect. An article of faith should not be thrown in the trash when it is broken, worn out or no longer of use as this would desecrate the sacramental. It must first be broken down in such a way that it loses its identity as a devotional item.

The Sisters of Carmel advise Catholics that a "sacramental should be returned to the earthly elements". Books, pictures of Jesus and Mary and scapulars should be burned and then buried. Rosary beads should be pulled apart from each other and statues should be broken into small pieces and buried. Metal objects should be melted and reused. An object that once was a devotional item should be buried in a place that will not be tread upon" ([Source](#)).

This is a free resource! For more information, visit www.acatholicmomslife.com

In addition to the regular posting for adult learners, we invite you to review the Faith in Five postings for Children (ages 3-8) and Children (Ages 8+) during the month of October.

**The weekly postings there will focus on the lives of the saints,
in preparation for November's All Saints Day!**