

Holy Water

Holy Water will be flowing freely from every font after the Easter Vigil this year. Most churches keep holy water on hand either in the Baptistry or in a separate covered font so the faithful have ready access to it. A priest or deacon may pray the church's water blessing at any time of the year, but the blessing of all blessings happens at the Easter Vigil.

Baptism is the Sacrament which opens the door to the others and incorporates us into the Body of Christ. So solemn is this rite, so rich its meaning, that we first bless its water. We pray that the Holy Spirit will give life to the water, making it fit for its holy purpose.

Holy water, quite simply, is left over Baptismal water. We set it by the doors of the church and bring it to our homes because it will remind us of our Baptism.

The water we bless at Easter usually doesn't last the whole year. In the old days, we used to have a second water blessing on Pentecost to boost the supply. Now there are several occasions when we bless water. For example, a water blessing and sprinkling can replace the penitential rite on any Sunday. On those days when the priest walks around sprinkling you with water at the beginning of Mass, he's not just playing games. He's making the connection between that Sunday and Easter, days of Baptism, faith, and new life.

Other occasions for blessing water include the rite of infant Baptism or a prayer service just to bless water as found in the Book of Blessings. The blessing should be a public event, not a private prayer in the sacristy. That way we can all join in the prayer and the renewal of our Baptism.

Ideally, the water we bless on Easter Day will at least last during the Easter Season. During the Easter Season we have alternate prayers for the sprinkling which replace Sunday's penitential rite, and for the blessing of water at infant Baptism. The prayers assume that we're using water which was already blessed at the Vigil.

However you use holy water, whether when walking into church, sprinkling your home, or to bury the dead, it will always remind us of what happens this Easter throughout the church, the Baptism which makes us members of the household of God.

Copyright © 1997 Resource Publications, Inc., 160 E Virginia St. #290, San Jose, CA 95112, (408) 286-8505. Paul Turner, pastor of St. John Regis Parish in Kansas City, MO, holds a doctorate in sacramental theology from San'Anselmo University in Rome. His e-mail is PaulTu@aol.com

