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# The SACRAMENTALS



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## THE SACRAMENTALS

BY DR. MARTIN KREUSER

[Translated from the German by Isabel Garahan]

THE CHURCH of God is rich and good. Christ has given her immense power—power to wage war against hell and sin and human weakness, throughout the world, wherever evil appears; she has power also to bring blessings and peace,

**The Power of the Church.** consolation and spiritual peace to any person who may be in need of these. In the Sacraments the Church offers us the great sources of grace which fill the abyss of sin, and whose refreshing waters flow over the regions of the earth where men are concerned for their souls' salvation. And the great power of the sacraments, the light and consolation we receive from them, are sufficient for us, as long as we strive earnestly after grace. But Christ in His mercy has made His Church still richer. Not only is it possible for us to live good lives and win our eternal salvation, in the Church; but we are moreover refreshed by an abundance of holy things which make our journey through life easy and peaceful, full of happiness and trust in God.

We should be fully conscious of all the beauty and holiness that accompany us on our journey through life. No other Church is so rich or so good. In other Churches the Word of God is heard and hymns are sung. But all else is prosaic and uninspiring. Whereas the Catholic Church contains so much that is beautiful and deeply significant, God's blessing coming to us from such abundant sources, that our hearts should overflow with joy and gratitude. I mean our sacramentals.

Ignorant and scoffing persons look upon our sacramentals as superstitious practices. Such persons do not understand our religion or they do not want to understand it. But on the other hand superstition is only too frequent among Catholics—a fact which brings no credit on our glorious faith and, moreover, is unworthy of a good and reasonable Catholic.

Hence it is extremely important to have a clear, decided idea of what superstition is on the one hand, and of the validity of our sacramentals on the other.

Most people are naturally attracted to the mysterious; they seek it in accidental and rare occurrences; they like the sensation of mingled hopes and fears, and are ever on the look out for mysterious effects produced by the simplest things; they imagine these to be real and allow themselves to be influenced by them, often with serious consequences.

Superstition is ascribing some secret power to things which possess no such power, such as the number 13, for example, the four-leaved shamrock, and so on. Sometimes, too, leaflets are circulated on which are printed certain prayers to which extraordinary promises are attached. This is "pious" superstition. Now, we Catholics should cast out of our religious life all such stupid practices and beliefs, even as we would not seek to discover the future from a fortune-teller, by cards or the lines of the hand. And if a person happened to be told something which turns out to be true, we should, nevertheless, desist from all such practices, that we may not mock the wisdom and omnipotence of God, which will not be revealed by such pitiful and absurd means.

Let us leave the future to God. It is His holy Will that it should remain unknown to us. And it is better so. If we make our eternal happiness secure—and this we can and should do every day of our lives—then we are taking all the care for the future that is necessary. The enlightened Catholic should have nothing to do with chance happenings and the evil influence of powerless, lifeless things. We stand entirely in God's care and providence. The Church has a wholesome, rational method of protecting us, body and soul. Empowered by God, she bestows the divine blessing on us and on our whole lives. Nor does she confine herself to what is merely necessary—the Sacraments and the worship of God. She goes further and accompanies us with her blessing, to the field and the mine, the factory and the store, the table and the sick bed. We are not left one day without God's blessing.

Our sacramentals are acts and things which bear in themselves

a mysterious power and the blessing and protection of God; and this in the most efficacious way; it is not the pre-conceived opinion of credulous Catholics. There are three kinds of things which possess truly mysterious power. First, all medicinal herbs and natural remedies which have been given this power by the all-kind Creator who bestowed upon man for his good, the earth and all it contains. Next, and highest of all, are the Sacraments which

consist of outward signs, and as such impart to us the greatest graces—graces which have been imparted by Christ Himself to these outward signs. Since these sacramental graces have been united to the visible signs by Christ Himself, the Sacraments are efficacious *in themselves*; for the same reason their validity does not depend on the pious disposition or the worthiness of the priests who administer them.

The sacramentals also have a supernatural power; hence they are no mere ceremonious or pious practices. They receive their power from the Church which through them transmits her blessing to us. Something of the Divine, something of the omnipotence and love of God are also imparted to them by the prayers of the Church. But whether the sacramentals impart their power to help and protect us, depends on us, on the intention with which we use them. They are essentially a part of our personal belief and trust in God; they presuppose our spiritual intention. Thus they are different from the sacraments in that they are not infallibly efficacious in themselves *without our co-operation*; the blessing conveyed by them is combined with our pious disposition. A person in the state of mortal sin will not receive grace from the sacramentals, such as medals or crucifixes, etc. This is true also in the case of persons who are without faith or confidence.

The sacramentals have this in common with the sacraments, that in both cases there is an outward sign with which grace is combined. But while this grace has been imparted to the sacraments by Christ Himself in Person, the spiritual blessings of the sacramentals come to us from the Church (empowered by Christ). Again, while the sacraments are efficacious in and

of themselves, the efficaciousness of the sacramentals depends on our pious intention. Finally, while the sacraments impart sanctifying grace, the sacramentals impart only auxiliary grace and protection against danger and temptation.

Hence, the sacramentals are only a completion of the sacraments, but a very beautiful completion, which enables us to drink more fully from the great source of grace which has been bestowed upon the Church by Christ.

**A Part of Catholicity.** Because the sacramentals accompany us everywhere we can apply them ourselves and because in a sense they belong to the everyday things of life and lie to our hand, they are very dear to us. A great deal of our Christian life and thought are contained in them; they are a constant, beautiful combination of the natural and the supernatural, of the divine and the human. In them, too, are preserved much beautiful national poetry and old Christian traditions and family spirit. In a word they form a part of Catholicity. Not an essential part, it is true, but one we would not willingly dispense with.

The earth bears God's curse since the time when it was first desecrated by sin. As St. Paul tells us, the creature waits for the revelation of the sons of God, for the creature was made subject to vanity (Rom. viii, 20). To the sin of our first parents cling all the misery and misfortune with which the creation is burdened. Hell came upon the earth with this sin; came, too, the endless temptations against which we must fight continually. Hence, naturally, the first concern of the Church is to free mankind from this evil, to protect him from evil influences, from the breath of moral decay and from all attacks of the enemy. The same power which Christ used over the spirits of hell and gave to His apostles, still lives in His Church.

## EXORCISM.

Hence, we find that in the prayers of the Church often the first consideration is the averting of evil influences. We should believe in the existence of evil spirits and their evil influence; they are as real as are the angels that look upon the face of God. St. Peter speaks of God's adversary as "a roaring lion that goeth about seeking whom he may devour." If, generally speaking, the devil's power is not manifested; if, for example, people are rarely possessed by evil spirits these days, this is because the power of hell was broken by the Redemption and because, moreover, we obtain so many graces through the Church of God that our souls are protected in this way. But the Church wants to avert all the evil influences which emanate from hell, by whatever names they are called. She desires that all things may be redeemed from such evil influences; so too, the bread we eat, what we drink, the dwelling we inhabit. All must be freed from the curse of sin that they may redound to the glory of God and the salvation of our souls.

Among other matters we find two exorcisms frequently recurring in the blessing of the baptismal font and in the blessing of holy water: "Therefore may all unclean spirits, by Thy command, O Lord, depart far from  
**Exorcism.** hence: may the whole malice of diabolical deceit be entirely banished: may no powers of the enemy prevail here: may he not fly about to lay his snares; may he not creep in secretly: may he not corrupt with his infection." Thus the exorcism at the blessing of the baptismal font.

When blessing water the Church pronounces a prayer of exorcism over the salt that it may become "exorcised salt for the salvation of the faithful, that by its use all sinful hallucination, all wickedness, the wile of devilish deceit, that every unclean spirit may vanish adjured by the Judge of the living and the dead."

In the same way the water itself is exorcised in the Name of the Most Holy Trinity as exorcised water "to banish every power of the enemy, uproot the enemy himself and cast him



out, together with his rebel angels, by the power of Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead."

The exorcising of one who is possessed by an evil spirit strikes terror into the beholder. The power of Christ is here manifested in His Church and her prayers and hence the evil spirit must yield ; often this is an appalling scene.

### ECCLESIASTICAL BLESSINGS.

Far above the warding off of evil influences are the ecclesiastical  *blessings*  and  *consecrations* . The distinction between these is not one of solemnity, but lies in this, that  *blessed*  objects are for the use of the faithful (e.g. holy water) whereas  *consecrated*  objects are reserved for use in the worship of God (chalices, churches, etc.)

We shall first consider the blessing itself, for the act of blessing is a sacramental no less than blessed  *objects* . In the earliest days a blessing was looked upon as the holiest and most important thing in the life of man.

**Blessings and Consecrations.** When the patriarchs were dying they always blessed their sons, and this was the most valued inheritance their children took with them through life. Before his death Moses blessed the Israelites. The Jewish priests blessed the people in the court of the temple morning and evening.

When Jesus was on earth He used to bless persons and things. He blessed the loaves and fishes, He blessed the bread and wine at the Last Supper ; He blessed children and He blessed His disciples before His Ascension.

Now we, too, can receive the holy blessing often, and we should value this sacramental highly, seeing in it a true blessing from God. The simplest form of blessing is that given with the  *hand* , bestowed by the priest in the sign of the cross. The priest, consecrated by God, sent by God, is always accompanied by God's blessing. And wherever he lifts up his hand and invokes the Most Holy Trinity, God's blessing descends from Heaven. A certain missionary made the habit of blessing his mission station from his window every night before retiring to rest. There was a chief in the district

who had not been converted and who, moreover, had never seen the missionary. This chief became gravely ill ; at night he saw an evil spirit in horrible shape coming towards him as if to seize him. But each time a white man stepped between and protected him from the evil spirit. A Christian young girl, hearing the story, made enquiries regarding the appearance of the white guardian angel who intervened. According to the description given by the chief, it was no other than the missionary priest who lived a considerable distance away. The chief sent a messenger to beg the missionary to come to him, and as soon as he saw him at once recognised him as the same he had seen coming to his rescue. Moreover the time concurred with the time at which the priest gave his blessing to the great missionary field. Not long after, the chief became converted to the faith.

Another example of the power of prayer is the following : The employees of a large factory, young men and girls, used to spend the intervals between the hours of work, sitting together and conversing in an unseemly

**The Power of Prayer.** Much scandal was given and the affair became known far and wide. The parish priest spoke against it in the pulpit, but without effect. He then decided to take a different

course. During the intervals when the employees congregated the priest went to the church and prayed and gave his blessing repeatedly to the young people who were using their free time in such a sinful way. Soon propriety was restored. A powerful blessing had descended on those who were too weak by themselves to ward off the evil or to set the good example. Thus, it is not exaggerated piety to ask the priest's blessing on ourselves, our children and our business.

The  *blessing given by the priest at the end of the holy Mass*  bears a special significance and special power. For it is a sacrificial blessing. The Sacrifice of our Redeemer by Christ, renewed here under the form of bread and wine, has been consummated, the holy Sacrifice is ended. And even as once Christ stood on Mount Olivet, with hands extended in blessing over all those who were with Him, and over the whole redeemed world, in farewell blessing as He sent forth his faithful, strengthened, comforted ; so to-day the priest on the altar,

turns towards the people and with a hand uplifted which a little time ago touched the Sacred Body of the Lord, and with lips which have just been refreshed with the most precious Blood, pronounces the blessing of the Most Blessed Trinity. Under the Sign of the Cross the blessing descends from the altar upon every heart. Thus we receive God's blessing, making the Sign of the Cross ourselves also. Blessed and strengthened, we go forth to take up the work of God that lies before us, each one in his own place, each in his own way. A glorious beginning of the day!

The *most solemn blessing* is that given with the *Most Blessed Sacrament*. Except the holy Sacrafice and the Sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist there is nothing more sublime in our Divine Service than this blessing with the **The Most Solemn Blessing** holds the Lord of all blessings, God Himself, whose blessing we now receive. What graces flow to our souls at this moment when the most holy Redeemer Himself is raised in blessing in the form of the cross! We should pause and think what a great, what a supreme moment this is. What other religion possesses such a monument as this! The most wonderful celebrations, the most magnificent festive processions we have ever witnessed have not the majesty, the sublimity of this moment when the faithful fall down in adoration before the Most Blessed Sacrament, praying: "My Jesus, in Thee I live, in Thee I die I am Thine in life and in death." And if the personal, divine blessing is received by us in the simplest village church or in the poorest wooden shed in a pagan land, we Catholics should feel grateful for these great sacramentals of our Church which are as beautiful as they are efficacious.

## PIOUS OBJECTS.

We will now consider the numerous objects which are blessed by the Church for our use and benefit. It is not the things themselves that receive the ecclesiastical blessing, but we, when we use them piously and con-

**Holy Water.** fidently. One of the simplest and most used by us in our homes is *Holy Water*. Water which flows over the earth in mighty rivers, drawing men into its awful depths, which empties itself into the great sea, which pours down the mountain side, crystal clear and full of mystery, becomes under the blessing of the Church, a silent source of grace, which we take to our homes and sprinkle on objects. The water has been purified from all that is evil, for the Church has prayed God to make it a means of imparting His grace. How beautiful it is on entering the House of God, to make the Sign of the Cross with the holy, cleansing water, wetting our forehead, breast and shoulders, our whole being, that our souls may be refreshed and strengthened for prayer and quiet recollection.

In our *bedrooms* we bless ourselves when we come from sleep and darkness to begin life anew, a silent reminder of our baptism when we were born again and come from darkness into a new, supernatural life. In this morning blessing we see as it were the hand of God leading us while He bids us to be strong, to rejoice and have no fear, for we are going with Him; we have much good to accomplish this day, as we set forth blessed for our day's work, for the labour and struggle that lie before us. Could we begin the day in a more beautiful way?

*At night.* There is a proverb: "night is the friend of no man." When we are going to sleep we wrap ourselves in the protection of the Sign of the Cross made with holy water, seeking thus a refuge from the unrest of the day, from its dangers and from our own weaknesses. We have returned to the Cross of Christ with which we began the day. We desire protection from the darkness of sleep, from the evil that creeps in the darkness and corrupts and destroys so many souls in the night. We seek protection against the evil that

can come upon us in the hours of unconsciousness. Making the Sign of the Cross with holy water is symbolic of morning and evening prayer. What we carry about with us in our hearts, whether these be joyous or disquieting thoughts, hopes or cares or petitions, we express these by the holy sign of cross made with holy water. With this holy water our mothers blessed our infant sleep, knowing well all it meant, all they would themselves say. With this holy water, too, our shroud will one day be sprinkled, the last greeting, the last blessing to accompany us into eternity.

*Blessed Palm*, another sacramental, is the modest adornment on the wall of our house; silent symbol of the Catholic spirit. The Church blesses the palm on the day on which we celebrate our Lord's entrance into the holy city; and

**Blessed Palm.** we take the little branch with us to our homes where it lies with us through days of gladness and days of sorrow. Fastened on our crucifix

or our holy water font, the palm branch bears a profound meaning for us. An ancient Christian custom was to bless the repast on Easter Sunday, using the new palm and new holy water, and praying that God would always send the necessities of life and grant that the food and drink would always be enjoyed in a Christian spirit. Country people who often have a more profound faith than those who dwell in towns, place a branch of blessed palm in their fields; nature, thus transfigured by religion, impresses us differently when it has received God's blessing. Our *blasé* world who have lost all simple joy in life, may look down contemptuously on such old-fashioned ideas. It is good that God pursues His own divine ways and that rational, pious people seek out His ways and follow in them.

A day will come when our palm branch will be taken from the wall and laid on the table which is set out in the sick room. The priest will use it to sprinkle the sick person that the oppressed heart may be lightened as the drooping blossom revives under the refreshing dew.

Once again, and for the last time, the little branch will be used in blessing, when loving hands, dipping it in holy water, sprinkle their dear dead. A last farewell greeting, the last service rendered to the departed soul.

Another holy sacramental, one which should also be in every house is *the candle blessed* on the feast of Candlemas. When the Mother of God brought her divine Infant to the

temple, the holy Prophet bending over the Babe, greeted Him as the Light of the world.  
**The Blessed Candle.** The blessed candle is a symbol of Our Divine Redeemer, His humanity and His divinity.

The pure bees' wax represents the sacred Body prepared by a pure virgin, the flame the Divine Nature which has become united to the human. The symbol of Our Redeemer received the ecclesiastical blessing that it may be held in reverence by all, and that it may bring God's blessing into every Christian house. It should be a light and a blessing, too, in times of fear and anxiety. When storms, thunder and lightning bring terror to our hearts, we take out our blessed candle, not in superstition, but as a beautifully embodied prayer, lighted in fear and in faith, with devotion and confidence. We who believe in the Church understand what we are doing.

Once a holy light was shed over our life—as we came from the baptismal font—the light of faith in our cleansed souls. Yet again a Light shone for us—when we made our solemn profession of faith before our first holy Communion. And once more the blessed candle will be lighted for us—when we are setting out on our last journey, our journey to eternity. At this solemn hour the lighted candle is a symbol of Our Lord standing by us, bestowing His consolation on us; warding off with flaming sword the attacks of evil spirits. In this solemn hour when the eye grows dim, we bring the blessed light to comfort and console. Who would despise these silent consoling mysteries of the Christian home, seeking instead superstition and folly?

A custom observed in some countries is to have a bunch of *wild flowers* blessed on the feast of the Assumption in honour of Our Lady. These are kept in the home and burned in time of storm. It is in keeping with the spirit of our faith that so simple a thing as a handful of wild flowers can be connected into a means of grace. Thus the Church can use in the service of God and the faithful all things that are natural and good.

Our *dwelling*s are also blessed by the Church. Whenever we enter a new dwelling we should have it blessed. For this is the little spot on the earth where we spend the most intimate

hours with those dearest to us, where we bring **The Home.** our joys and our sorrows, where we look for peace and strength for further effort, where the greatest things in the life of man are enacted, and where we celebrate our most beautiful feasts ; where, too, misfortune finds us and the trials sent by God have to be suffered. If each of us can say, " My home is my world," then this world of ours should be blessed. When blessing a dwelling, the Church prays that the right spirit may come and dwell there ; she prays that the spirit of kindness and meekness, chastity and modesty may abide therein. In her prayers she recalls that holy, retired spot where the wise men of the East arrived with their gifts to adore their Lord and God. She recalls, too, the holy Family—the beautiful Model of all Christian families. What though this home is poor like that Home in Bethlehem—if only the Lord and His Mother abide there. What if there be neither gold nor incense, if only quiet contentment, honesty and industry are to be found there!

The blessings of the Church are inexhaustible. She seems to have forgotten nothing that is significant in our lives. She blesses our *food*, praying that all evil for body and soul may be averted from it. She blesses the *fruits* of the field, praying that they may be protected from the storm and may have God's blessing. She blesses the *threshing floor*, recalling how an angel of God once appeared to the Judge, Gideon, and called him from the threshing floor to be the leader against Madian. Sometimes the most beautiful poetry is contained in the simplest prayer or blessing.

The Church has a particular blessing also for the *linen of the sick* ; in her prayer she recalls how the sick woman was healed by touching the hem of Christ's garment. She has

of course a special blessing, too, for all medicines and medicaments.

**In-**  
**exhaustible Blessings.** *Our Daily Bread.* The Church prays that " Jesus Christ, the Bread of Angels, the Living Bread, the Bread of Eternal Life who blessed the loaves in the desert," may grant health of body and soul

to those who receive this bread. Observe how the Church raises up all the natural things of our everyday life which thus become transfigured.

The Church has a blessing also for *agricultural produce*, eggs, cheese, cream, bacon, birds whose flesh we eat, and bees which prepare the honey we consume, and the pure wax used for candles for the altar. She blesses, too, all *domestic animals*, and especially *sick animals* ; salt, corn and oats and the stores where they are kept.

Nor does the Church merely adhere to old traditions. She brings the blessing into modern life, bestowing it on all healthy, human progress, every new discovery and invention. She has a special blessing for the *telegraph*, praising God for this invention. Thus the Church accompanies modern progress and blesses it. When an aeroplane first appeared above the city of Rome, Pope Pius XI, happening to be in the garden of the Vatican, raised his hand and blessed this latest work of man.

The Church blesses *the railway* and all means of travelling, invoking the angel Raphael, patron of the traveller, to protect him from all dangers.

The *dynamo machine* has its own special blessing.

Another sacramental much valued by devout Catholics is the *blessing of St. Blase*. Many sick persons were healed by this holy man, notably a boy who had a fish-bone in his throat, and was almost choked. His mother brought two candles as an offering. The saint held them in the form of a cross to the boy's neck and the boy was immediately relieved.

Others are the Willibrord water for the healing of sore eyes, Hubert's bread, St. Antony's lillies, and so on.

It is touching and edifying to see the great confidence placed by the faithful in the sacramentals, and how rich the Church is in these auxiliary means of meeting the needs of the pilgrims on earth. It is true we can be good Catholics without these minor helps ; but we cannot see them detached from their background. A living world of faith and confidence lives in these things and their use.

A sacramental specially familiar to us is the rosary beads, to which when blessed great indulgences are attached. They



should always be carried about with us. In no sense are they simply a means of counting our prayers as the ancient faithful used to count the number of "Our Fathers," they said by a bag full of beads. A rosary said devoutly is always a good prayer, one which costs no time and trouble, but zeal and recollection. Hence its great value as a prayer offered up to God. It is a combination of oral and mental prayer, the mysteries of the life of Jesus and of Mary offering the most beautiful subject matter for meditation.

While reciting the rosary these events should be kept clearly before our minds. To one the rosary is an easy road to God and His holy Mother, while to another it is a difficult prayer with the monotony of numerous Hail Marys. But for all it is an excellent means to salvation. It is a favourite prayer with people who pray much. But there is no reason why anyone, the most modern or the most cultured person, should be ashamed of it.

*Blessed medals* and *scapulars* are always to be met with among Catholics. The world looks upon these as pagan superstition, as charms used against misfortunes. But no rational Catholic ascribes any such effects to them. The person who wears them with a pious intention receives a special blessing from the Mother of God, and abundant grace from the Most Holy Trinity in whose Name they are blessed. Besides this they serve to remind us of certain prayers we have undertaken to say, they exhort us to have confidence, and they are a visible pledge of the promise of special help to those who wear these blessed objects with faith and confidence.

A sacramental we receive in the solemn time of Lent is the *Blessed ashes*. This is less a blessing than an earnest reminder that our bodies shall return to the dust, the aim of such reminder being that we may become humble and cast aside our inflated ideas of life, that in the eyes of God we shall feel ourselves to be nothing, to be no more than the ashes from which He has made us ; that we may reflect, too, on the passing of all things. As the green palm branch turns to grey ashes,

so, too, we shall, soon or late, turn to dust ; that even now we are most surely on our way to the silent grave, and hence we should continue our journey through this life in all earnestness and wisdom.

The sacramentals are most powerful and efficacious in our spiritual life. When we receive them accompanied on our part by the right disposition, venial sins are forgiven us, and we are thus preserved from many evils of body and soul. Of course, we must not expect an unfailling effect from the use of such objects, and we should employ them for no other end than that for which they are blessed.

### BLESSING OF PERSONS.

The Church bestows special blessings on her children in times of great need. She considers in the first place *the child*, having in mind the Divine Friend of children, who took the little ones in His arms and promised them the Kingdom of Heaven. The Church then prays that the little ones may grow in grace and wisdom with the Divine Child, that they whose guardian angels behold the Face of the Father in Heaven, may always love and fear God, keep His Commandments and live a good and happy life.

The Church shows a maternal solicitude for *sick children*, invoking God, their guardian angels and the apostles, Peter and Paul, to whom was given power to restore health. In her prayer she touchingly invokes the Saviour as "Son of Mary, Lord and Salvation of the world." Recalling His own childhood and His own Mother, the Church, as it were, appeals to Jesus now to save a child and make a mother happy.

*Expectant mothers* receive a special blessing in which the Church prays that He who prepared a mother's womb in which to begin His human life and whose nearness brought joy and happiness to St. John within his mother's womb, may now protect a mother and her child. She also invokes the angels of God to abide with and protect and keep the mother and child.

As the Saviour when on earth helped the sick, showing them His particular attention and love, so the Church has a blessing for all *sick persons*. In her prayer by the sick bedside she appeals to Christ's love for the sick, and asks Him to give them now consolation and courage and recovery.

Now, while the Church shows such concern for our temporal and eternal salvation, we should be desirous of her blessing. When the priest visits our house, why should not we ask him to bless our children? And again, what a consolation it is when he gives his blessing to our sick! Such visits are Godsent, and not mere visits of friendship or politeness. Those who have special need of a blessing should not deprive themselves of the Divine power which often times alone can help.

### CONSECRATED TO GOD.

Hitherto we have been considering the blessings and blessed objects which are beneficial to us, body and soul. We shall now enter a new territory, one in which all things are reserved for God, consecrated to God alone. A holy

**Consecrated** atmosphere surrounds these and in their **Things.** presence we feel near to God. We will now consider these consecrated things that we may learn to feel becoming reverence in their presence.

On Holy Thursday the *holy oils* are consecrated by the bishop. These are used by the Church in the administration of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, extreme unction and holy orders, to anoint the altar, and the church in the twelve places which are later to bear the mark of a cross. Kings and emperors are no longer anointed.

The consecration of *the church* by the bishop is accompanied by magnificent ceremonies. So, too, *the altar* on which is to take place the greatest event in the knowledge of man. Every year we keep the feast of the consecration of our Church. On this important occasion we should be conscious of the great privilege we enjoy in having a temple of God in our midst, a consecrated place where we can spend our most precious hours and where our soul is at home, where we can kneel at the feet of our God. When we enter the church we

tread consecrated ground. Here no person has any rights or demands; God dwells here and He alone has all rights in this place. While we are here all that is

**Churches.** enacted in the world without ceases for us.

It is such a special privilege to come to visit God, to come into the silence of the Divine Presence away from the world, from the traffic of life! We may take nothing of the world into this holy territory which we should enter with a recollected spirit and without curiosity or vanity.

At the consecration of the church the exterior is sprinkled with holy water while prayers invoking the mercy of God are said. The floor is strewn with ashes in which the Latin and Greek alphabets are then inscribed in the form of a large cross extending over the floor of the church. This is to signify that we are in a Catholic church in which the Holy Sacrifice is offered up for the whole world. Our life has its beginning, middle and end in our church. Therein we receive the first grace—in the sacrament of baptism, there we receive at all times the mercy and love of God and the Food of Eternal life. It is our hope that the Saviour will come from thence to us in our sick room. Finally, in the church will be pronounced the last words for us: "Eternal rest grant to him, O Lord!"

We should look upon our church, especially our parish church as the holiest place on earth which we tread reverently, because it has been consecrated to the Lord God. Therefore it is a very grievous sin to desecrate this holy place, not alone by sacrilege, such as murder or blasphemy, but also by unworthy conduct or giving bad example of any sort.

All Catholics desire that their last resting place should be in consecrated ground, and so our *cemeteries* are consecrated by the Church. Five large crosses on which candles are placed are erected on the ground which is

**Cemeteries.** taken over by the bishop as the hallowed resting place for the departed. Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to have the cemeteries in the towns, owing to the large numbers of inhabitants and, therefore, they lie outside, contrary to the ancient custom of burying the faithful beside the church. It is a privilege we would all wish to have—that our resting place should be close to the church,

close to Him who is our Saviour, in the shadow of the altar before which we knelt so often and on which the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered up for us so often.

The *church bell* is also consecrated for the service of God. As though it were a living being possessing a soul, it is baptised and given a name. It is annointed. Its consecrated voice is not heard on occasions of profane festivities ;

### Bells.

for it serves holiness only. The church bell has a special power over men's hearts ; it rings out joyously on festive occasions and in solemn exhortation when sorrow comes. Its voice is always holy, a call from God, a note from Eternity. We associate so much feeling, of joy and of sadness with the sound of the bell ; what happiness filled our hearts when its voice summoned us to our first holy Communion ! What sorrow was ours when we had to follow the funeral of someone dear to us ! Always it summons us : to holy Mass and to evening devotions. Three times in the day it proclaims over the whole world the mystery of the Incarnation. The church bell is a great means of grace. If only we always obeyed its consecrated voice !

Everything surrounding the altar of God is blessed, for here all things are for God's service alone. The *altar linen*, the *vestments* worn by the priest during the holy service, the *sacred vessels*—all are consecrated by the bishop.

Is not our whole life surrounded by blessings and holy things which make our journey one of safety and peace ! Thus protected a thousandfold, we can receive no hurt from the diabolical powers unless we ourselves invite

### Precious Gifts.

them, making way for them, to enter the holy sphere in which we are so secure, where our Christian life with its work and its strivings is surrounded by strong, if invisible walls. Here we receive so many helps, so many weapons with which we can fight against evil and win our eternal salvation. In the right, enlightened use of the sacramentals there lies so much genuine Catholic thought and feeling, so much beautiful transfiguration of the material life around us, so much armour to protect us against wickedness and all evil influences ! Therefore let us respect and esteem these gifts which the Church places in our hands. Let us not be ashamed of our sacramentals. Let us not hide

our rosary beads, our holy water font, medals and scapulars from anyone. Our sacramentals are almost a necessity to the human heart ; they make superfluous the superstition and weakly habits of those who do not find contentment in their religion. From a human point of view, it is necessary to have objects, tokens and customs which are a support for our spirit and a means of expressing our fervour.

The world has numerous signs and tokens and customs which have little meaning beyond that of politeness or social tact. But we have need of such things in religion also, since as human beings our senses require some point of contact,

**The Treasury of Grace.** some bond with all that is holy, supernatural, divine. But over and above all stands our Faith which sees behind the sacramentals the great treasury of graces which the Church possesses, the infinite merits of Our Saviour and God's love which never wearies, helps us at all times and everywhere desiring to be near us also in our manifold sacramentals.

Where the sacramentals are wanting, monstrous superstition is present—a form of weakness that is unworthy of the rational human being and leads to heresy and fanaticism ; for where the temple of God is closed, the witch's den is open.

I should like to add a few words with regard to certain Christian customs which we should not allow to die out of our lives. They are sacramentals which we ourselves can use

without the priest and not in the name of the Church, but in the name of our faith and trust in God. A beautiful custom is, before

entering a *new dwelling*, to bring first a crucifix and holy water, some salt and bread. Thus when the Crucified Saviour is the First to enter our new home, God's blessing goes before us. In this way we humbly pray that God will not let us want our daily bread and that He will give us all we need.

Another excellent family custom is the following : Before cutting bread the wife or mother makes the sign of the cross over it. This custom has not passed out of family life. People always like to eat *blessed bread*, and the Lord's holy sign of the Redemption should be upon it. Even our bread should be redeemed.



## THE SACRAMENTALS

Thus we have manifold instances of pious customs which are full of Christian sentiment. Let us bring them forth; let us forget none, lose none. Let our Christianity be evident everywhere. Let God's blessing be everywhere; in the bread bin, in the pocket where a little statue of a saint is kept. In the early days of Christianity all things had their cross; the front door, the plate, the glass, ornaments, everything. The Christian Spirit was over all, in the house and outside. Let us at least honour the little tokens and customs which show a Christian spirit. Women and young girls should revive the good old custom of wearing a *little cross* as ornament, suspended from the neck. This is now no longer modern. And why? Because unbelief and immorality, revolt and stagnation have become modern. But for this very reason we should show the world once again what is holy and pure, Christian and God-like. For us the Cross is not folly. It means the protection of God, the love of Christ, the blessing of the Church, a token of the highest honour, the sign by which we profess a Christianity that is whole, true and courageous.

In this sign you shall conquer!

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