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Connell, Francis J.
- The Sacramentals
ADM 1427

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What They Are. What They Do.

By

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New York
THE PAULIST PRESS
401 West 59th Street

Imprimi Potest:

ANDREW KUHN, C.S.S.R.,
Provincial, Baltimore Province.

Nihil Obstat:

ARTHUR J. SCANLAN, S.T.D.,
Censor Librorum.

Imprimatur:

✠ PATRICK CARDINAL HAYES,
Archbishop of New York.

New York, July 3, 1930.

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED IN THE U. S. A.
BY THE PAULIST PRESS, NEW YORK, N. Y.

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PART I

THE SACRAMENTALS IN GENERAL

What Sacramentals Are

THE word *sacramental* in its literal sense means *related to the sacraments*. As an adjective, this word is used to designate whatever essentially pertains to the seven sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ. Thus, we speak of “sacramental grace,” “sacramental oils,” etc. As a noun, the word *sacramental* first appeared in the twelfth century, and for a time was used by theologians in a very general sense. For example, the pronouncing of the Holy Name, and the giving of alms were called sacramentals. The same designation was applied to the symbolic rites with which the Church embellishes the administration of the sacraments—for example, the giving of the candle, and the conferring of the white garment, in Baptism—which rites are nowadays known as *ceremonies*.

Modern theologians use the term *sacramentals* in a more definite sense, to designate a class of sacred things, instituted by the Church, but in some respects

Canons in this pamphlet refers to the Code of Canon Law.

similar to the sacraments. The Church has given official approval to this signification of the word by thus defining sacramentals in her Code of Canon Law: *Things or actions which the Church is accustomed to use somewhat after the manner of sacraments, to obtain by her prayer, effects, especially those of the spiritual order* (Canon 1144).

In two respects the sacramentals are similar to the sacraments, and in two respects they are dissimilar. The two points of resemblance are: first, the sacramentals, like the sacraments, are *external rites* (sometimes even made up of *things* and *words*, as the sacraments are essentially composed); secondly, like the sacraments, the sacramentals are capable of conferring benefits (principally of a spiritual nature) on those who use them with the proper dispositions.

The points of dissimilarity between the sacramentals and the sacraments are: first, whereas the sacraments were instituted by Jesus Christ, the sacramentals have been established by the Church. According to present ecclesiastical legislation, the right to institute sacramentals belongs exclusively to the Holy See (Canon 1145). Secondly, the manner in which the sacramentals confer their salutary effects differs essentially from the mode of efficacy proper to the sacraments. For, sacraments possess the divinely granted power of bestowing grace *directly*; whereas sacramentals produce their effects only *indirectly*—that is, through the good dispositions they inspire in those who use them, and through the prayers of the Church that are attached to them (p. 7).

Sacramentals can be classified under three general heads—exorcisms, blessings, blessed objects. We shall briefly consider each of these three classes.

Exorcisms

An exorcism is a command given to the devil, ordering him, in the name of God, to depart from some person, place or thing. The Holy Scripture and well-authenticated historical records testify conclusively that the Almighty sometimes permits the fallen angels to exercise a certain influence over the doings of men. This may go even to the extent of the demons' taking up their abode in the body of a living person—which case is known as *diabolical possession*. When the evil spirits molest persons from without, their activities are called *diabolical obsession*. The purpose of the Church's exorcisms is to compel the devils to desist from their malicious interference in human affairs.

In employing exorcisms the Church is acting after the example and by the authority of Christ Himself, Who during His earthly life frequently cast out devils from possessed persons (Matthew viii. 38; ix. 32), and Who commissioned the rulers of His Church, in the person of His Apostles, to do the same (Matthew x. 8). A considerable number of exorcisms are found in the Church's liturgical books. Some of these are for ordinary use in sacred functions—those, for example, that are employed in the preparation of holy water. Others, of a more solemn character, are destined only for well established cases of diabolical possession or obsession.



One of the Minor Orders that a clerical student receives in advancing to the priesthood is the Order of Exorcist, which constitutes him an official minister of the Church's exorcisms. However, no clergyman is allowed to exorcise solemnly a person molested by the devil unless he has obtained special permission from the Bishop. Ordinarily, this permission is granted only to a priest of eminent piety and prudence; and before undertaking the ceremony of exorcism, he must make a thorough investigation to determine whether or not the person is really being harrassed by the evil spirits (Canon 1151).

Blessings

As a sacramental, a blessing is a prayer that draws down God's favor on some person or thing. The Church has established two kinds of blessings—*constitutive* and *invocative*.

A constitutive blessing is one that makes a person or thing *sacred*—that is, dedicates a human being or an inanimate thing in a special way to the service of God. Such is the blessing bestowed on a monk when he is raised to the office of abbot, the blessing of a rosary, and the blessing of holy water. The more solemn forms of constitutive blessings are called *consecrations*. Thus, we speak of the *consecration* of a church or of a chalice.

An invocative blessing is one that obtains the divine assistance for those for whom it is pronounced, without however rendering any person or thing *sacred*. Such a blessing can be imparted to a person

either *directly*, or *indirectly* through some object. An example of the former is the blessing of throats in honor of St. Blaise, given on February 3. This does not specially dedicate the recipients to the service of God, but only procures for them the protection of divine providence against ailments of the throat. An example of the indirect invocative blessing is the blessing of a house, which does not render the building sacred, but only invokes God's favor on those that dwell therein.

The maternal interest of the Catholic Church in even the most commonplace happenings of our everyday lives is apparent from the number and the variety of the blessings that have been formulated by the Holy See, and which extend to almost every possible sphere of human activity. In the Roman Ritual (the book prescribing the rites for sacraments and sacramentals) there are special invocative blessings for bread, fruit, crops, silkworms, a fire-engine, a ship, an aeroplane, a printing-press, an invalid's wheel-chair—as also, blessings for the sick, for travelers, for pregnant women, for mothers, etc.

The ordinary minister of blessings is a priest. However, certain more solemn blessings, as the consecration of a church, can be performed only by the higher ecclesiastical dignitaries, such as bishops or cardinals; while a few, like the blessing of the Agnus Dei (p. 18) are reserved to the Pope. Of course, the sign of the Cross, which is one of the oldest and most efficacious blessings can be bestowed by any one upon himself (p. 13).

Blessed Objects

The third class of sacramentals comprises objects that have been blessed with a *constitutive blessing*—holy water, scapulars, rosaries, blessed pictures, and the like. An object that has received a constitutive blessing remains sacred until it has been destroyed or has been so altered that it can be said to have lost substantially the form in which it existed when it was blessed, and can no longer be employed for its proper purpose. Thus, a church loses its consecration when the greater portion of the walls collapse—a chalice, when it is melted into a lump of metal. The drippings of a blessed candle are no longer sacred. Moreover, certain blessed utensils—for example, a chalice—lose their consecration if they are used for ignoble purposes or are exposed for public sale (Canon 1305). When a blessed object such as a scapular, a rosary, or an Agnus Dei becomes so worn or soiled that it cannot suitably be used it should be burned. The same applies to prayer books and Bibles, even though they have not been blessed.

To be beneficial as a sacramental, a blessed object must be used devoutly, in accordance with its religious purpose. To wear a crucifix merely as an ornament, or to venerate a blessed picture simply for its artistic excellence, would produce no spiritual fruits. However, to use a blessed article for some ordinary purpose in case of necessity is not sinful, provided no irreverence is intended. Thus, a thirsty person would be allowed to drink holy water if no other water were available; a blessed candle could be used to furnish

light if other means of illumination were lacking. But such use of these sacramentals is allowed only as far as necessity demands. For example, blessed candles should not be employed merely to give an air of elegance to the dinner table. (It must always be remembered that we are speaking here only of objects blessed with a *constitutive* blessing. Things over which an *invocative* blessing has been pronounced—for example, food at table—may be used in the same way as objects over which no such blessing has been pronounced.)

Besides possessing value as sacramentals, blessed objects are sometimes enriched with *indulgences*. When priests bless rosaries, crucifixes, etc., they generally attach to them whatever indulgences they are empowered to grant by the Holy Father. Indulgenced articles lose their indulgences when they are sold (Canon 924).

How Sacramentals Work

The sacramentals do not possess the power of communicating grace *directly* to the souls of men. This manner of efficacy is proper to the sacraments, by virtue of their institution by Jesus Christ Himself. The sacramentals, being established by the Church, can produce their effects only *indirectly*—and that, principally in two ways—first, through the dispositions of the recipient; secondly, through the prayers of the Church.

By making use of a sacramental devoutly a person animates himself with pious sentiments. Thus,

by kneeling to receive a blessing from a priest we enliven our faith; by gazing on the crucifix we arouse in our heart sentiments of love for God and of sorrow for sin. Then, by virtue of these sentiments we can render ourselves worthy to receive from God some favor, either of the spiritual or of the material order. The more fervent are the dispositions we thus arouse by means of the sacramentals, the more worthy do we become of receiving favors from our Heavenly Father.

But over and above this mode of obtaining the divine assistance—which, after all, is available from the use of even those pious actions and objects that are not sacramentals—the sacramentals possess special efficacy because the prayers of the Church accompany their devout use. As the one true Church of Jesus Christ, animated with His spirit, continuing His mission on earth, the Spouse and, in a certain sense, the Body of Christ, the Catholic Church is ever most pleasing in the sight of God. Consequently, the prayers and the good works of the Church as a society are most efficacious to obtain divine favors. Now, in establishing the sacramentals, the Church promises to join her own prayers and the intercessory value of her good works to the dispositions of those who employ devoutly these sacred things and actions. Thus, whenever a person makes pious use of a sacramental, the powerful prayers of the great and holy Catholic Church are directed to God for him; and this is what gives to sacramentals their special spiritual value.

The Effects of the Sacramentals

The chief effects produced by the sacramentals can be summarized under the following five heads:

(1) *The dedication of a person or of a thing to the special service of God.* This effect is produced by constitutive blessings and by consecrations, as was explained above (p. 6).

(2) *The repression of evil spirits.* This is particularly the effect of the Church's exorcisms; but it is produced also by other sacramentals, especially by the sign of the Cross and by holy water.

(3) *Actual graces.* In consideration of the dispositions of the person using the sacramental, and especially because of the prayers of the Church attached to its use, God imparts to the devout user *actual* graces, by which he is empowered and urged to perform supernatural acts of virtue—for example, acts of faith or of charity. Unlike the sacraments, the sacramentals have not, as one of their proper ends, the conferring of *sanctifying* grace, the supernatural habit by which man is made a partaker of God's own nature and acquires a title to eternal glory. Nevertheless, the sacramentals can lead to the attainment of this divine gift. For example, a sinner may be induced by the recitation of the rosary to make an act of perfect contrition, by virtue of which he merits the infusion of sanctifying grace.

(4) *The remission of venial sin and of the temporal punishment due to sin.* By the devout use of sacramentals a person is led to perform acts of virtue that contain, at least implicitly, a detestation of his

minor transgressions. Through these acts he obtains from God the forgiveness of these sins, and also the remission of some portion of the temporal punishment due to them.

(5) *Temporal favors.* Since it is lawful to pray for temporal favors, a person may direct the use of a sacramental to obtain the recovery of his health, success in business, etc. Some sacramentals are expressly intended for definite temporal benefits, like the blessing of the throat in honor of St. Blaise. Certainly, out of regard for the faith of those who use sacramentals for temporal ends, and because of the prayers of the Church attached to them, God often grants material blessings—sometimes in an almost miraculous manner. However, since all the sacramentals have as their principal end the *spiritual* advantage of the user, they will not procure temporal favors when God foresees that these will not be profitable to a person's eternal salvation. But in every instance the sacramentals, if rightly used, will obtain some spiritual benefit. The Church emphasizes this predominance of the spiritual over the temporal in the efficacy of the sacramentals, by always introducing a petition for supernatural favors into the blessings directed to the procuring of temporal benefits.

Not all the sacramentals are equally effective in obtaining all these various effects. For example, the use of the crucifix is better adapted to obtain the remission of sins than the restoration of health; but the blessing of St. Blaise is more effective in curing a sore throat than is the crucifix. A person desiring to make use of sacramentals for some definite purpose

should choose preferably those established by the Church especially for the attainment of this particular end.

For Whom the Sacramentals Are Intended

In establishing the sacramentals, the Church has primarily in view the spiritual and temporal advantage of her own members. Catholics therefore are the principal beneficiaries of the sacramentals. To receive the full measure of their salutary effects, the recipients should be in the state of grace. However, even one in mortal sin may use a sacramental with profit; and sometimes the first incentive the sinner receives to return to the friendship of God is derived from making the sign of the Cross or from kissing the crucifix.

But in her great love for souls the Church wishes to extend the beneficial effects of the sacramentals even to those who are not her children. Hence, blessings and exorcisms can be bestowed not only on Catholics and on those who are preparing to enter the Church but also (unless there be a positive prohibition) on non-Catholics. Hence, one who is not of our communion would be allowed to receive the blessing of St. Blaise, or to possess a blessed rosary or scapular. In giving her blessing to non-Catholics, the Church prays especially that they may receive the light of faith (Canons 1149, 1152).

From the benefits of the sacramentals, however, the Church excludes excommunicated persons and those under the ecclesiastical censure known as per-

sonal interdict (after sentence of excommunication or interdict has been pronounced), and those Catholics who, without a proper dispensation, with full consciousness of their sin have contracted a mixed marriage (Canons 2260, 2275, 2375). However, exorcisms may be pronounced over excommunicated persons (Canon 1152).

PART II

SOME SACRAMENTALS IN PARTICULAR

The Sign of the Cross

Since it was on a cross that Our Divine Savior died in order to redeem men from their sins and to reopen to them the gates of heaven, it is only natural that Christians from the earliest times should venerate the sign of the Cross. We have ample proof from the writings of the ancient Fathers—such as Tertullian, St. John Chrysostom, St. Jerome—that this sacred sign was in common use among the faithful during the first centuries of the Christian era. In those days the usual method was to trace the sign of the Cross with the thumb or forefinger on the forehead.

Nowadays, there are two methods of making the sign of the Cross employed in the Latin Church. One consists of three small crosses made with the thumb on the forehead, lips, and breast. This type of Cross is made by the priest before the Gospel at Mass, and is also in ordinary use in some parts of Europe. The other and more common method consists in touching the right hand (with the fingers extended, and not doubled up) to the forehead, the breast, the left shoulder and the right shoulder, while saying, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." Some slight variations are found in the sign of the Cross made by Christians of the Eastern rites—for example, they hold their fingers so as to form the initials of Our Lord's name, and they generally touch the right shoulder before the left.

The sign of the Cross should always be made slowly, reverently and exactly. The symbol itself is an acknowledgment of our belief in the doctrine of the Incarnation—that the Son of God became Man and died for our salvation on the cross; while the words that accompany it profess our faith in the profound mystery of the Holy Trinity—that God is one in three Divine Persons. Moreover, the sign of the Cross is most efficacious in securing for us the protection of the Almighty and in repelling the assaults of the evil spirits.

Good Catholics make the sign of the Cross on awakening in the morning, before going to sleep at night, before and after prayers, and when they enter or leave the church. It is advisable to sign one's self with this sacred symbol on other occasions also—for example, before and after meals or when one is molested with a severe temptation. An indulgence of fifty days may be gained by making the sign of the Cross—which is increased to one hundred days when the use of holy water accompanies this sacred action.

Holy Water

Many centuries before the coming of Christ, the use of water in religious ceremonies was prescribed for the Jewish people by God Himself (Numbers xix.). Indeed, being the ordinary means of purification, water is so appropriate a symbol of the purity of heart with which man should approach to pay homage to God that even the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans made extensive use of this element in their religious rites.

The Jews were accustomed to purify themselves before entering the temple. The Church seems to have imitated this ceremony from the very beginning, by placing vessels of water at the church-doors, so that the faithful could wash their hands and faces before taking part in the sacred functions. As early as the fourth century there was a blessing given to this water, and the custom arose of using it on other occasions and for other purposes. In the ninth century Pope Leo IV prescribed that on Sundays in every parish church water should be blessed with which the people should then be sprinkled and which they could also take to their homes. This ruling of a thousand years ago still survives in the *Asperges* which is held on Sundays before the parish Mass.

The formula employed in the blessing of water implores the Almighty to free those who use it from all uncleanness, to grant to them health of body and of soul, and especially to repel the evil spirits from wherever it shall be sprinkled. A small quantity of blessed salt is also added to the water in the form of a cross.

The Church prescribes the use of holy water as an adjunct to many of her sacred rites—for example, at the blessing of articles of devotion, in the solemn rite of exorcism, when the priest attends a sick person, when the body of a departed Christian is consigned to the grave.

Catholics are recommended to make frequent use of this sacramental, and should always have holy water in their homes. It is a praiseworthy custom to sprinkle one's bedroom before retiring at night.

Mothers should make the sign of the Cross with holy water over their little ones when they have been put to bed, in order that they may enjoy the special protection of God and of His holy angels during their slumbers. Whenever the priest is called to visit a sick member of the family a vessel of holy water should be placed on a table near the bed.

Besides the ordinary holy water, the Church has other kinds of blessed water. For example, there is Gregorian water, mixed with wine, ashes and salt, and specially blessed for the consecration of churches. Baptismal water is blessed on the vigils of Easter and Pentecost. Also, on the former of these occasions Easter water is blessed. This should be used to sprinkle the house on the same day or during the octave of Easter, and should not be reserved and used as ordinary holy water during the year. Some special formulas for blessing water in honor of certain Saints—for example, St. Ignatius, St. Vincent de Paul—are also found in the Ritual.

Candles

Lights have always been regarded as an appropriate accompaniment of religious services. The Almighty commanded Moses to have a seven-branched candlestick made for the ceremonial functions of the chosen people (Exodus xxv. 31); and among the ornaments with which Solomon adorned the Temple were ten golden candlesticks (3 Kings vii. 49).

The Catholic Church has used lights in her religious functions from the earliest centuries, as is evi-

dent from the writings of St. Athanasius, St. Jerome, St. Paulinus of Nola. In primitive times, oil lamps were usually employed for this purpose; but for many centuries the official liturgical light of the Church has been the wax candle. This is a very apt figure of Christ—the wax representing His body, the wick His soul, the flame His divinity. For the sanctuary lamp the Church prescribes either wax or pure olive oil (Canon 1271).

The Church insists rigorously on the use of lighted candles at certain religious ceremonies—for example, at the celebration of Mass, and at the distribution of Holy Communion. Every Catholic family should have at least one blessed candle in their home in readiness for a sick-call. On such an occasion, if the priest is bringing the Blessed Sacrament, some one should meet him at the door with a lighted candle and should escort him to the sick-room. To satisfy the liturgical laws fully, two candles should be lighted while Holy Communion and Extreme Unction are being administered. The blessed candle may be lighted in the home on other occasions also, when God's protection is specially needed, as when there is danger from fire or from lightning.

Candles are solemnly blessed on February 2—Candlemas Day. This particular day is chosen because it is the feast of Our Lord's Presentation in the Temple (forty days after His birth), and it was on that occasion that the holy Simeon designated the Infant Savior as "a light to the revelation of the Gentiles" (Luke ii. 31). In blessing the candles the priest prays that they may contribute to the bodily

and spiritual health of the faithful both on land and on sea; that those who use the candles may be inflamed with the fire of God's love; and that after the perilous darkness of this life, they may attain to light unflinching. Candles may be blessed at other times also throughout the year with a more simple formula.

At the services on Holy Easter Saturday morning a large candle, called the Paschal candle, is blessed and set up in the sanctuary. On this occasion the representation of Christ by the candle is accentuated by five grains of incense which are inserted in the wax, to symbolize the five wounds that Our Savior retained on His body when He rose from the dead. The Paschal candle is lighted at solemn functions until Ascension Thursday, when it is extinguished to designate the departure of Christ from earth to ascend to His throne of glory at the right hand of His Heavenly Father.

Agnus Dei

The phrase *Agnus Dei* signifies "Lamb of God," and it is frequently applied to Jesus Christ, in imitation of St. John the Baptist who pointed out Our Redeemer to the people as "the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29). As a sacramental, an *Agnus Dei* is a disk of wax on which is imprinted the image of a lamb. A large number of these disks are blessed by the Pope during Easter week in the first year of his pontificate and in every subsequent seventh year, and are distributed throughout the world. For personal use these *Agnus Deis* are

divided into tiny pieces, each of which is enclosed in a small bag—usually heart-shaped. This may be worn around one's neck or carried on one's person.¹

In blessing the *Agnus Deis* the Pope prays that those who use them with faith may be delivered from the attacks of the evil spirits, from storms and from fire, and especially from a sudden and unprovided death. God's loving mercy is also invoked on expectant mothers.

Those who make use of this sacramental have the assurance that they have been included in the prayers of the Vicar of Christ. The *Agnus Dei* is an especially appropriate sacramental for children, since the lamb is a symbol of the innocence and gentleness that are characteristic of childhood.

Scapulars

A scapular is a garment, worn over the shoulders and hanging down in front and in back. It forms part of the garb of many of the older religious Orders—for example, the Benedictines, the Carmelites, the Dominicans. The scapular which all Catholics are allowed to wear is an imitation of this religious garment, reduced to small proportions so that it can be worn under one's ordinary clothing. Those who are entitled to wear one of these scapulars become to a certain extent members of the religious Order to which the scapular belongs; and they share in some meas-

¹Some doubt can be entertained whether the small *Agnus Deis* are really sacramentals, because it would seem that the original disk loses its blessing by being divided. However, good authorities can be found who assert that these are sacramentals (*cf. American Ecclesiastical Review*, 1897, I, p. 436). But little bags containing drippings from ordinary Paschal candles—which are sometimes called *Agnus Deis*—are certainly not sacramentals.

ure in the fruits of the prayers and of the good works of the religious composing the Order.

Since a large number of religious Orders permit such partial affiliation there are many different kinds of small scapulars—for example, the brown scapular of the Carmelites, the white of the Trinitarians, etc. To gain the spiritual benefits of the scapular one must be *enrolled*—that is, officially invested in this sacred garb by a priest possessing the proper authority. Most priests possess such authority with respect to several scapulars. There is no restriction as to the number of scapulars with which a person may be enrolled.

The scapular is blessed when a person is enrolled; but when he procures a new one of the same Order, it is not necessary to have it blessed again. A scapular medal (bearing the image of the Blessed Virgin and that of Our Lord showing His Sacred Heart) may be worn in place of the scapular, but this medal must be blessed with a distinct blessing for each scapular whose place it is taking. Moreover, a person cannot partake of the benefits of the scapular medal until he has first been enrolled in the cloth scapular.²

Rosaries

A rosary is made up of a number of beads fastened in regular order on a chain. There are various kinds of rosaries used by Catholics with the approval of the Church—the rosary of the Seven Dolors of the Blessed Virgin, the rosary of the Precious Blood, the

²An exception is made for soldiers, who may be enrolled with a scapular medal.

rosary of St. Joseph, etc. But the most common form of rosary is that in honor of the Mother of God, composed of five decades, each of which contains a large bead for the Our Father and ten small beads for Hail Marys. This division is adapted to the consideration of five events in the life of Mary, of which there are three series—the joyful, the sorrowful, the glorious. The recitation of this rosary is one of the most approved devotions of the Catholic Church; and the entire month of October is consecrated to the cultivation of this exercise of piety among the faithful.

Every practical Catholic should possess a rosary, carry it always on his person, and frequently recite it. Before it is used, a rosary should be blessed and indulgenced.

Sacred Images

The Catholic Church approves of pictures, statues, medals and other representations of Our Lord, of His Virgin Mother Mary, and of the Saints. These images remind us of the lives and of the virtues of those whom they represent, and incite us to invoke their protection. Moreover, when blessed, these images bear the fruit of the Church's prayers to those who make use of them as sacramentals. It is hardly necessary to state that Catholics do not *adore* images nor pray to them. Our worship and invocation are directed to those whom the images depict; but we have also a certain affection and veneration for the images themselves, even as a dutiful son loves and venerates the portrait of his mother.

Catholics should never be ashamed to have sacred pictures exposed in their home—not only in the seclusion of the bedroom but also in the parlor or sitting room, where visitors can perceive that they are the guests of a truly Catholic household. Moreover, it is commendable to carry about in one's pocket or around the neck a medal of Our Lord or of Our Blessed Lady or of some favorite saint.

Blessed Ashes and Palms

To put ashes on one's head has been regarded as a sign of penance and of humility from the earliest times. In the first centuries of the Christian era it was customary for the bishop at the beginning of Lent to sprinkle ashes on the heads of those who were doing public penance. Gradually this practice was extended to include all the faithful. On the first day of Lent (Ash Wednesday) the priest blesses the ashes before Mass, invoking the divine mercy on those who are taking part in the ceremony. Then he marks the forehead of each with the holy ashes, pronouncing the words that were spoken by God to our first parents when they were driven from Paradise: "Remember man that thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return" (Genesis iii. 19).

On the Sunday before Easter the Church blesses palm-branches and distributes them to the faithful, as a reminder of Christ's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem a few days before His death, when the people honored and greeted Him by waving palms.

The formula used in blessing the palms asks that

those who make use of them may merit by their good lives to meet Christ in heavenly glory. When the blessing is given solemnly, all hold their palms in their right hands during the procession, and also while the Gospel of the Mass is being sung. A piece of blessed palm should be kept in every Catholic home until the following Palm Sunday.

CONCLUSION

In regard to sacramentals two extremes are to be avoided. On the one hand, no one should despise them as if they were something superstitious or were intended for the use of only ignorant persons. God makes use of very simple and ordinary means in leading men to eternal life; and the devout use of the sacramentals is very profitable for the learned as well as for the ignorant. On the other hand, persons should not regard the sacramentals as being endowed with miraculous power, or as being infallible safeguards against temporal evils. One who has received the blessing of St. Blaise may die of a disease of the throat; and one who is wearing the scapulars may be drowned. For it must always be remembered that the primary end of the sacramentals is the *spiritual* welfare of the users, and this is sometimes best attained by the endurance of trials and sufferings.

Appropriate to this matter is the admonition to the clergy of the United States given by the Second Council of Baltimore in 1866: "Let preachers and pastors take pains to explain to the faithful the nature, the signification, and the right use of these things

(sacramentals). Let them persuade those who trust too much in their wisdom and cleverness that these things, insignificant and unimportant though they may seem, are not to be despised, since they are of no little assistance toward right living and the attainment of salvation. Let them admonish less educated persons—who are apt to fall into the contrary error—that they must not attribute too great efficacy to sacramentals, nor think that these of themselves can avail much, without any pious dispositions (on the part of the recipients). Let them especially reprehend those who use these sacred things like charms, such as heathens have, to preserve them from the wrath of God even when they are sunk in the mire of the most hideous vices” (*Decret. Concil. Balt. II, n. 350*).

OUTLINE OF THE SACRAMENTALS

(Intended Especially for Study Club Discussions)

I. THE SACRAMENTALS IN GENERAL

1. Formerly the noun *sacramentals* was used in a very general sense and embraced almsgiving, the ceremonies accompanying the administration of the sacraments, etc. Nowadays by *sacramentals* are meant things and actions instituted by the Church to procure for mankind benefits, especially of a spiritual nature. The sacramentals are like the sacraments in as far as they are external rites capable of conferring benefits; they differ from the sacraments in as far as they are of ecclesiastical origin, and do not possess an inherent power to give grace.

2. There are three classes of sacramentals: (a) *Exorcisms*. By means of these the Church commands the devil, in the name of God, to refrain from doing harm to some person or thing. A priest may not solemnly exorcise a possessed person without the special permission of the bishop. (b) *Blessings*. A constitutive blessing renders a person or thing sacred; an invocative blessing asks the divine assistance for those over whom it is pronounced or who are to use the object over which it is recited. Most blessings can be given by priests; some, however, are reserved to bishops or to the Pope. (c) *Blessed Objects*—that is, those blessed with a constitutive blessing. A blessed object remains sacred as long as it retains substantially the same form it had when blessed. Such objects should

be used, ordinarily at least, only for religious purposes.

3. Sacramentals produce their effects in two ways: (a) They stimulate the devout user to make acts of faith, love of God, etc., through which he is made worthy to receive favors from God. (b) They have annexed to them the prayers of the entire Church for those who use them piously.

4. The sacramentals dedicate persons and things to the special service of God, repress evil spirits, procure actual graces, remit venial sins and the temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven, and obtain temporal favors. Certain sacramentals are better adapted to each of these effects than others.

5. The sacramentals are intended principally for Catholics, but most of them can be used beneficially also by non-Catholics. Certain persons are positively excluded from the benefits of the sacramentals, especially those on whom a sentence of excommunication has been pronounced.

II. SOME SACRAMENTALS IN PARTICULAR

1. *The Sign of the Cross* has been in use among Christians since the early centuries. It reminds us of the chief mysteries of the Christian religion. There are two ways of crossing oneself—first, by making three small crosses on forehead, lips and breast; second, by making one large cross on forehead, breast and shoulders. The Sign of the Cross is very efficacious and should be made often by Catholics.

2. *Holy Water* signifies purity of heart. Its use in

the Church as a sacramental dates from the fourth century. It is especially efficacious in repelling evil spirits. It should be used frequently by Catholics, and should be found in every home. Besides the ordinary holy water, the Church has water blessed in honor of certain saints and on certain festivals, especially on Holy Saturday when Easter water is blessed for use during the octave of Easter.

3. *Candles* have been used by the Church from primitive times especially for the celebration of Mass. A blessed candle should be in every Catholic home to be used for sick-calls and in times of great danger. Candles are solemnly blessed on Candlemas Day, February 2nd. The paschal candle, blessed on Holy Saturday, with its five grains of incense, is a symbol of Christ risen from the dead bearing the five wounds. It is lighted at solemn functions until Ascension Thursday.

4. *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God). This is a disk of wax bearing the image of a lamb, blessed by the Pope. Small portions of this sacramental may be carried on one's person.

5. *Scapulars*. A scapular is a religious garb. Small scapulars, which Catholics may wear, entitle them to a share in the prayers and good works of the religious Orders to which the particular scapulars belong. To enjoy the privileges of a scapular, one must be enrolled. The scapular with which one is enrolled must be blessed; subsequent scapulars need not be blessed. After enrollment a person may substitute a blessed medal for the scapular.

6. *Rosaries*. A rosary is a chain of beads for counting prayers. The rosary in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary is one of the most approved devotions of the Catholic Church. Every Catholic should have a blessed rosary.

7. *Sacred Images* remind us of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin and the saints. We direct our worship and prayers to those whom the images represent, not to the images themselves.

8. *Blessed Ashes*, strewed on the head of a Catholic the first day of Lent, are a symbol of penance and a reminder of death. *Blessed Palms*, distributed on the last Sunday of Lent, are a reminder of the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, a few days before His Crucifixion.

CONCLUSION

Two extreme attitudes toward the sacramentals should be avoided. First, they should not be despised as superstitious objects; second, they should not be regarded as capable of conferring temporal favors infallibly. When properly used, the sacramentals contribute much toward the spiritual progress of Catholics.

TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

The best manner of replying to the objection that the use of sacramentals is superstitious—The history of the Rosary, the manner of reciting it, and its benefits—The laws of the Church concerning the use of candles at various liturgical functions—The history of the scapular, and the enumeration of the various

scapulars available to the faithful—The heresy of the Iconoclasts (eighth century)—The rites of solemn exorcism—The various kinds of holy water used in the Church—How a practical Catholic uses the sacramentals.

REFERENCES FOR COLLATERAL READING

For all: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, under the headings, "Sacramentals," "Holy Water," "Iconoclasm," etc.; *Externals of the Catholic Church*, by Sullivan; *Sacramentals and Some Catholic Practices*, by Cardinal Gasquet; *The Sacramentals of the Catholic Church*, by Lambing; *Holy Water*, by Theiler; *The Sacramentals of the Holy Church*, by Barry.

For more advanced students: *Codex Juris Canonici*; *De Sacramentis Ecclesiæ*, by Connell; *Matters Liturgical*, by Wuest-Mullaney.

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