

Blessings, Consecrations, Exorcism

The following information about sacramentals is taken from public domain sources.

[Blessings](#) [Exorcism](#) [Consecration](#)

Blessings

1. Through exorcism, man and nature are freed from the power of Satan; through blessings he is sanctified, his original destiny restored. Through blessings, nature is again made serviceable for man; many spiritual and temporal evils are averted, and spiritual as well as temporal welfare procured.
2. The power to bless is given to priests and bishops, and is exercised by them either in general or in special cases to produce a certain efficacy prescribed by the Church.
3. Blessing consists in prayer united to an outward sign, generally the sign of the Cross, or by the imposition of hands, whereby the minister of the Church invokes the Divine blessing upon others, if they are worthy of receiving it.
4. Even in the Old Testament, God designated minutely how Aaron and his followers should bless the people, and promised that He would fulfill their blessing. How much greater is the priesthood of the New Testament, therefore the priest's blessing will at least be no less efficacious.

"Into whatsoever house you enter," said Christ to His disciples, "first say: Peace be to this house: and if the son of peace be there, your peace rest upon him, but if not, it shall return to you. From these words of our Lord, the faithful have always believed, that the priest has power to bestow blessings upon all who are worthy of receiving them.

This blessing is more particularly to be desired from the priest newly ordained, because he has so lately received the fullness of this power from the Holy Ghost.

5. The priest may bless publicly or privately; publicly in connection with the Divine Service, especially at the end of Mass; this was prescribed even in early Christian times. He blesses privately, when blessing the sick or any who asks his blessing.
6. As the consecration of a bishop is higher than that of a priest, so the bishop's blessing will be more efficacious. When the bishop bestows his blessing, it is done more solemnly than the blessing of a priest; he makes the sign of the Cross three times, which is not permitted to a priest. The bishop may give this solemn blessing apart from the Divine Service. Privately he may bless the people everywhere even on the streets and highways. We should eagerly seek to receive this richly laden blessing.
7. The Papal Blessing is the most efficacious because it is bestowed by the highest shepherd, the vicerent of Christ, to whom the supreme power over the treasury of Christ's graces is committed. With the Papal Blessing also called Apostolic, an indulgence is generally united.

The Holy Father bestows this blessing solemnly on the festival of Easter, on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, and on other special occasions. Privately he confers it on all who ask it. Very frequently he empowers bishops and religious priests to give the Papal Blessing on certain days to the faithful. As we have before mentioned the Papal Blessing is given in the General Absolution at the hour of death.

8. Benediction, or blessing with the Blessed Sacrament, was not known in early Christian times, it was only introduced after the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi (in the fourteenth century). It is easy to see that this Blessing differs from those already named, for here it is no longer the priest who blesses but Christ Himself, therefore the priest uses no words of blessing when giving Benediction, but makes one sign of the cross with the monstrance; when given by a Bishop he makes three.

9. The priest may bless with the relics of the saints, while doing so he invokes the intercession of the saints on behalf of those present.

10. The blessing which parents give to their children, superiors to their subjects, does not compare with the priestly blessing, for it does not proceed from a person canonically empowered to impart blessings. Nevertheless a parent's blessing has a higher significance than that of pure intercession.

By the fourth commandment, God gave parents a higher authority over their children—made them His representative, consequently their prayers and blessings must be of greater might before God, than those of others. When the Apostle speaks of a universal priesthood, parents, first of all, are called by God to direct this priesthood in the family circle and to call down the blessing of God upon their offspring. Ecclesiasticus says (iii 10-11): "The father's blessing establisheth the houses of the children, but the mother's curse rooteth up the foundation." The Christian mother will not fail to make the sign of the Cross upon her babe, nor pious children fail to ask their parent's blessing, at least before going to bed or when leaving home. To many a young man, the remembrance of a parent's blessing has often proved a safeguard in time of temptation, while battling with the world. The blessing of a dying parent especially, is most solemn and efficacious, and often has been the means of reclaiming the most hardened sinner.

11. The Ritual contains many blessings for objects of ordinary use, such as food, the houses we live in, the cattle and fields. Even for the modern inventions, railroads, telegraph, electric lights, etc. The faithful should be encouraged to make frequent use of this means of grace, and thus draw down the blessing of heaven upon themselves and their undertakings. By the use of Holy Water we may draw the blessing of the Church upon ourselves and our possessions.

Churching of Women Blessing

1. It is an old established custom for a woman after the birth of a child to present herself to the priest in the church, to receive his blessing and to implore the blessing of God upon her child. This custom was observed even in the Old Law. Every mother had to present herself in the temple, with her infant, forty days after the birth of a boy and eighty days after the birth of a girl. This law, it is true, does not apply to Christian women because the Church has abolished Jewish ceremonies, but since the Mother of God conformed to this rule, the Christian mother will in all humility follow the example of the Blessed Virgin. She should thank God for her happy delivery, and offer her child to God, promising to bring it up in the fear and love of God, and finally implore the blessings of heaven upon herself and her child.

2. The priest sprinkles the woman with Holy Water, while she kneels at the door of the church holding a lighted candle, and after reciting the twenty-third psalm, reaching the end of the stole into her hand he leads her into the church saying: "Come into the temple of God; adore the Son of the Blessed Virgin, who has given thee fruitfulness." The woman then kneels before the altar, while the priest, having said a prayer of thanksgiving, blesses her and again sprinkles her with Holy Water in the form of a cross. This rite is for women who have borne children in wedlock.

3. The lighted candle is to remind us of the words of the pious Simeon who called Christ the Light of the world, by it the mother also acknowledges that she will bring up her child in the light of the true faith.

Christian Burial

1. The Church not only stands by her children until death but does not delay to send help and consolation to the soul in eternity, and to prepare a worthy burial place for the body where it will await the general resurrection. This resting place is the graveyard consecrated especially for this purpose. The Church deems it only proper that the body of a Christian should be interred in consecrated ground, because it was so often sanctified by the reception of the Blessed Sacrament.

2. The Church buries her dead with many outward ceremonies, prayers and blessings, not only to show her respect for the dead, but at the same time to impress the living with the truth, that the body is not to remain forever in the grave but to arise to eternal reward. She thus honors the body as the temple of God, edifies the living, and procures help and consolation for the soul, if it is in need.

3. Ecclesiastical burial is denied in the following instances:

- To pagans, Jews, and infidels.
- To apostates.
- To notorious heretics and schismatic.
- To those publicly executed and interdicted.
- To those who committed suicide, if before expiring they did not manifest any repentance. Those, however, who committed suicide while insane or deranged can be buried by the Church.
- To those killed in a duel.
- To public and notorious sinners who die in final impenitence.
- To those who die in the act of some grievous crime.
- Finally to those who refused the Sacraments at the point of death.

4. The body is prepared for burial, by washing and dressing it properly before placing it in the coffin.

5. The body remains for a time unburied, in order to make certain that life is really extinct. In former times the body was brought to the church, where the faithful prayed psalms and other prayers, day and night, for the departed.

6. A Crucifix is placed in the hand of the departed, and one upon the coffin; a cross is borne in procession to the grave and, finally, one is planted upon it, to show that the departed died a servant of the Cross, and through the Cross hopes for eternal life.

7. The bells are tolled to pay a last honor to the (lead, calling upon all the faithful to pray for him, and accompany him to the grave.

8. One or more candles are kept burning beside the corpse to signify that the departed walked in the light of faith, and to remind us of the oft repeated prayer: "May eternal light shine upon him."

9. The priest and servers are vested in black to express their grief and sympathy for the bereaved, also to express their sorrow for the soul lest it has not yet attained to the vision of God. This maternal care and sadness of the Church, is shown in the whole burial rite.

The Church does not wish that her children should be indifferent and callous at the death of relatives, she seeks rather to ameliorate and ennoble their grief by participating in their sadness, and lead them to think of a meeting beyond the grave.

According to the Roman Ritual, the corpse should be carried to the house of God, and a Requiem Mass said, then the body is blessed and borne to the grave accompanied by the clergy, friends and relatives praying or singing mournful psalms on the way. Before it is interred it receives a last and farewell blessing.

10. The absolution, also called Libera because the hymn begins with this word, is a blessing over the corpse that the Lord may be merciful to him and pardon him in judgment. The Church like a loving mother stands before the Divine Judge and implores grace for her child. This absolution takes place after Mass before the bier; here Holy Water and Incense are used as well as at the burial itself.

11. The words spoken at the grave: "Remember man that dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return." remind us of the judgment pronounced by God over all mankind after the sin of our first parents. The Church impresses it every year upon the forehead of her children on Ash Wednesday, so that they shall always have it before their eyes. This sentence is fulfilled at the burial of the body.

12. Children who die after Baptism before they have come to the use of reason are free from sin and need no prayers. Therefore at the burial of children, psalms of praise and thanksgiving are said, and there are no prayers for the repose of the soul. Signs of mourning are not appropriate here, so the priest is vested in white, for white is the color of innocence.

Because the child is under the ban of original sin, Holy Water and Incense are used, to purify and sanctify it, that it may be worthy to stand one day, in the presence of God. When a Mass is said at the burial of a child, it is said in honor of the Angels.

Exorcism

1. By the sin of our first parents Satan obtained power over mankind and all nature. Christ, it is true, conquered Satan, but as far as it concerns us, the conflict is not ended and therefore the influence of Satan is not entirely lost or destroyed.

The Evil Spirit can, God permitting, obtain power over the body of man, and through the body obtain power partly over the soul; this dominion of Satan over the body is called "possession."

2. The Church confronts this power of Satan by exorcism, which consists in commanding the devil to depart in the name of Christ, that he may not injure body or soul.

3. The Church makes use of exorcism for a threefold purpose, *viz.*:

- To withdraw the power of Satan from every object used in connection with the Divine Service, and to make it inaccessible to his influence, *viz.*, Holy Water.
- To lessen or destroy the injurious influence Satan has upon the soul or worldly possessions.
- To liberate those possessed, from the thralldom of Satan.

4. Christ Himself cast out devils, and gave His disciples also the power to do so. Ever since, the Church has made use of this power, and has made that of Exorcist one of the Minor Orders. To avoid abuse, the exercise of this power has been in later times restricted to priests; and even they in important cases, require special permission from the bishop.

5. Exorcism is a spiritual combat with the powers of darkness; therefore the priest must employ all his moral strength against Satan, consequently, he should begin the exorcism only after a careful preparation, with faith and confidence in God, patiently continued to the end.

6. The Church commands great caution in the use of exorcism. Every unusual phenomenon should not be attributed to Satan, but should be carefully tested by natural means, and all superstition and suspicion conscientiously, avoided.

Consecrations

1. Consecration is the act of solemnly dedicating a person or thing to the service of God. Persons and things consecrated, are not only withdrawn from the influence of Satan, as through the exorcism, nor only are blessings and graces imparted, but besides all these they receive an impress of a special character, a stamp of higher rank whereby they are qualified for the service of God.

2. The effect of this consecration is twofold. A person or thing is consecrated for the service of God, and equipped for this purpose with higher power and at the same time qualified to procure grace and blessings for others. Consecrated persons impart these blessings by their effectual agency, consecrated objects, however, through their application.

3. Consecrations are divided into that of persons and objects. The consecration of persons is reserved to bishops. A great many objects may be blessed by the priest, such as Holy Water, the blessing of ashes and the blessings performed during Holy Week.

Consecrations: Dedication of a Church

1. When a Church is about to be built, a bishop, or priest appointed by him, must solemnly perform the laying of the corner stone; for the house of God must be blessed from the foundation throughout all its parts.

a) First, the place upon which the church is to be built, especially that place destined for the high altar is sprinkled with water blessed for the purpose, accompanied with prayer.

b) The corner stone is blessed in the same manner and marked on all sides with the sign of the Cross, it is then laid while the Litany of the Saints, and other prayers are said. This blessing of the corner stone extends to all parts of the foundation.

2. The dedication of a church is only a precursor of the consecration, in case the latter cannot take place, the bishop may delegate a priest to perform the dedication, but not the consecration.

3. The solemn blessing, or consecration of a church requires that

a) it be withdrawn from the influence of Satan,

b) that it should be elevated to a place of grace and prayer and

c) finally, that it shall be consecrated as the exclusive property of the house of God. This is expressed by the words of the bishop when he invokes God to bless, sanctify and consecrate the church and the altar.

4. The preparation for the consecration is as follows: The consecrating bishop, who should be fasting the day before, sets apart over night, in a proper place, the relics to be used in the consecration. Light burns before them and Matins and Lauds are said in honor of the saints whose relics have been procured. Twelve crosses are also marked on the walls of the church with candles attached to them. Next day these candles are lighted, and all things needed are prepared in the church which is left in charge of a deacon duly vested. The bishop goes in procession around the outside of the church three times sprinkling it with Holy Water, knocks three times at the church door with the pastoral staff saying: "Lift up your hands, ye princes and be ye lifted up, ye eternal gates, and the King of glory shall enter in." Three times the deacon asks: "Who is the King of glory?" Twice the bishop answers: "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle," and the third time, "The Lord of armies, He is the King of glory."

The bishop then enters with the clerics and others whose assistance he requires, leaving the rest of the clergy and people outside, and again closes the door. He forms a cross with the letters of the Greek and Latin alphabets, which he inscribes with his staff on ashes previously sprinkled upon the floor of the church—this rite symbolizes the instruction to be given to Catechumens in the elements of the faith.

The cross is made from one corner of the church diagonally to the opposite corner. Upon the Cross of Christ, the Church continues to flourish from one end of the world to the other.

5. Then the bishop proceeds with the consecration of the altars; he marks five crosses on each with his thumb, which he has dipped in a preparation of water, ashes, salt and wine, specially blessed for this purpose, and sprinkles them seven times with this mixture. He also goes three times around the inside of the church and sprinkles the walls as well as the floor. Later the relics are borne into the church, the bishop, clergy and people taking part in the procession. An address is made to the people on the event of the day, and the outside of the door is anointed with chrism.

6. The sepulchres of the altars, that is, the place where the relics are deposited, are also anointed with chrism, and the relics placed in them. The table of the altar is anointed in the same manner, then incensed and five crosses made on it with the Oil of the Catechumens as well as with the chrism.

Chrism is also used to anoint the twelve crosses which have been marked on the walls. Incense is burned on the five crosses previously made on the altar with the blessed water, oil, and chrism. Finally the bishop makes a cross with chrism on the front and four corners of the altars, then the cloths, vessels, ornaments, etc., are consecrated and the consecration of the church is complete. St. Thomas clearly states the meaning and use of this consecration (Summa iii, xxx) "The rite," says the Saint, "signifies the holiness secured to the Church by Christ's Passion, and which is also required of its members."

Consecration of a Cemetery

1. From the earliest Christian times it has been the custom of the Church to bless the resting places of her dead. What is more appropriate than that the bodies which have been so often sanctified by the body of our Lord, should be gathered in hallowed ground to await the general resurrection.

Next to the Church no place should be more sacred to the congregation than the cemetery, and, if possible, it ought to be consecrated, but as long as this cannot be done the individual graves ought to be blessed.

2. The cemetery, being a holy place, should be kept in good condition and often visited by the living to pray for their friends and relatives. It is an instructive school which vividly places before our eyes our own transitory life, and impresses upon us the fact that in death, we shall all be alike equal, that riches, honor, and worth disappear, and that we are not made for this earth but for eternity.

Consecration of a Bell

1. In the first centuries church bells were not used. During the Christian persecutions it was the duty of the doorkeeper to inform the faithful of the time and place of Divine Service. Later wooden instruments were used, our clappers in Holy Week remind us of these. Now and then, trumpets were used for the same purpose. We do not know exactly when bells were introduced; they were used at Nola in Campania and gradually introduced into the churches in the seventh century.

2. On account of their importance in connection with the Divine Service, bells have been solemnly blessed since their first introduction. They are, as it were, messengers from a higher world, calling to the faithful not to forget their heavenly home.

3. The form prescribed in the Pontifical is entitled, "The Blessing of a Bell," though it is popularly called the "Baptism of a Bell," a title by which the Office is mentioned as early as the eleventh century. The bishop or priest delegated by him washes the bell with Blessed Water, anoints it with the Oil of the sick on the outside, at first in silence, then he prays that its tone, like the voice of God, may ward off everything injurious or deadly. He then makes seven crosses with the same oil on the outside, saying each time, "Blessed and sanctified shall this bell be! In the name of the Father," etc. The seven crosses are typical of the sevenfold source of sin and death, against which the bell, sanctified by the sevenfold strength of the Holy Ghost, shall grant assistance to the faithful. He makes four crosses with chrism on the inside it shall call the faithful from all parts of the heavens, and inspire them with zeal for God and His Holy Word.

4. Under it he places the thurible with incense and fragrant herbs, to denote the love of God which should inflame Christian hearts in work as well as in prayer; this is denoted furthermore by the Gospel of

St. Luke, in which reference is made to the one thing necessary by our Lord when conversing with Martha and Mary. He prays repeatedly that the sound of the bell may avail to summon the faithful and excite their devotion, that it may drive away storms and terrify evil spirits; this power, of course, is due to the blessings and prayers of the Church and not to any efficacy superstitiously attributed to the bell itself.

Coronation of a Pope

1. On the tenth day after the demise of a Pope, the Cardinals assemble in the same place where he died, to the so-called Conclave. After a solemn High Mass, to implore the light of the Holy Ghost, they retire to a part of the palace where they are entirely secluded from the rest of the world. A suite of rooms is given to each cardinal and his attendants. Then all the windows and doors that open outward are walled up, and no Cardinal dare leave his quarters until after the election, except in case of sickness, and even then if he leaves the palace he loses his right of vote. Food is sent in to them under the greatest supervision, by means of a turn. By this strict seclusion every external influence that might be brought to bear on the papal election is prevented. The Cardinals meet in the chapel every day to vote, this is repeated until some one Cardinal has received at least two-thirds of all the votes. If the election is successful the Cardinal dean asks the one elected if he accepts the office; if he consents, the fisherman's ring is placed on his finger and he must give the name, which he wishes to bear as pope. Then the oldest of the Cardinal deacons opens a window facing the street and announces the result of the election to the crowd of people waiting below in the following words: "Romans, I announce to you good tidings of great joy. We have a Pope, the most eminent and most Rev. Cardinal N. N., who has taken the name N. N."

The fisherman's ring is that small papal seal which represents St. Peter in a boat drawing in his net. With this the Pope seals Decretals of minor importance written in Latin and signed by the cardinal secretary.

The Pope takes a new name, because when Christ made Simon head of the Church He gave him the name Peter. Besides this, the changing of the name indicates that he has been consecrated for the welfare of our Holy Church exclusively, and therefore must sever family ties, or at least not consider them to the detriment of the Church.

2. The newly elected Pope now receives the homage of the Cardinals. They kiss his right foot, that is the cross embroidered on the slipper, as a sign of their allegiance, then they kiss the right hand as a sign of filial veneration. This homage is repeated three times—in the Conclave, in the Sistine chapel, and in St. Peter's church. This may be to denote the threefold power of the Pope. At the last named homage, besides the Cardinals, inferior prelates and persons of rank take part, whereupon the Pope gives the people the Apostolic blessing.

3. Some days later the coronation of the Pope takes place in the following manner:

- He is carried into St. Peter's church under a rich canopy as a sign of the respect due to the Head of the Church. In the Chapel of St. Gregory he again receives the homage of the Cardinals and prelates. When leaving the chapel in solemn procession, the master of ceremonies kneels near the door and burns on a plate, castles formed of oakum, saying in a loud voice: "Holy Father, thus the glory of the world passes away." This is repeated three times with a short pause

between each. This warning on the vanity of everything earthly is all the more impressive, as in the Chapel of St. Gregory are found the graves of the Popes.

- When the Pope reaches the altar of St. Peter, the solemn Mass begins; after the Kyrie has been sung, he sits upon the throne, and the three first cardinal bishops, stand before him and implore Almighty God to pour upon him, who has been raised to the highest Apostolic dignity, the fulness of His blessings. Then he receives the Pallium, and thus equipped with the full dignity of the episcopal office ascends for the first time as Pope the altar of St. Peter and continues the Mass. A part of the clergy go now to the tomb of St. Peter to pray for the happy reign of the new Pope, the successor of St. Peter.
- At the close of the Mass, the Pope goes to the balcony of St. Peter's church, where the first Cardinal deacon places the triple crown—the tiara —on his head with the words: "Receive the tiara adorned with three crowns, and know that thou art Father of Princes and Kings, Ruler of the world; Vicar of our Savior Jesus Christ to whom be glory and honor forever! Amen." In the name of the most Holy Trinity, the new Pope shall rule as teacher, priest and shepherd. After the coronation, the Pope gives the solemn Benediction, with a plenary indulgence.
- In grand procession he proceeds to the Lateran church, which is the chief or Cathedral church of Christendom—the mother of all churches—therefore he solemnly takes possession of it; on the way he is handed the keys of the city. He is solemnly received into the Lateran church, where the Prefect of Rome hands him two keys, one of gold, the other of silver, as a sign of his power to bind and to loose. After he has been seated upon the throne, he receives the homage of the Chapter of this church; he is then led into the council hall of the Lateran palace, where he gives to each of the Cardinals and the most distinguished prelates, a gold and a silver memorial coin. From the gallery he bestows his blessing upon the people, and has some small silver coins thrown among them, with the words: "He divided with the poor, his justice shall last forever."

Throughout the entire ceremony of the coronation, the papal dignity is shown to be the highest upon earth, but it must be united with humility and a love of sacrifice.

Consecration in the Religious State

1. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of sacrifice; this spirit Christ bequeathed to His Church, where it continues to grow in the priesthood, and reaches its highest point in the religious state. This state forms, by the more perfect practice of the virtues and its consequent external activity, a powerful spiritual ally of the Church. Therefore the Church has taken this state particularly under her protection and instituted different consecrations for its various Orders. We find, even in the first Christian centuries, a solemn blessing and consecration of virgins, who dedicated themselves to perpetual chastity and to the service of God. Out of the lives of the hermits and these virgin souls developed the Religious state. The Church not only regulated this state but blessed and sanctified it; she appointed a time of probation—a novitiate—for those entering the Order, which must last at least one year. During this year the novices must be proved and if they find that they are called to this state of life, they must earnestly prepare for the profession of their vows.

2. Entrance into the novitiate, the so-called Reception, preceded by a longer or shorter period of trial, is made by the solemn reception of the religious habit. The prescribed ceremonies differ according to the object of the different Orders and their respective rules. The essential part is the solemn blessing and investing with the habit.

As levity is generally shown in the dress, so the long, modest dress of Religious should show earnestness, modesty and virtue; therefore the novice is usually reminded at Reception to lay aside worldly sentiments with the worldly garb, and to strive to acquire virtue and modesty. Unless in case of necessity, as long as they remain in the Order, the Religious is never permitted to wear worldly dress again.

3. When the prescribed time of probation has passed, and the novice has reached the required age, then the profession of vows may be made. Until then the novice may leave the novitiate at any time, and the convent may likewise dismiss him when it is seen that he has no vocation. With the profession, however, he belongs, forever to the Order, as a return to the world is not permitted without a dispensation.

As the ceremonies of Reception vary so do the ceremonies of Profession. What is essential to all, are the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, which are the foundation of the whole Religions State.