

Why Do We Bless Ourselves with Holy Water upon Entering the Worship Space?

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Upon entering the worship space, we usually dip our hand into the baptismal font and bless ourselves with the Sign of the Cross. “In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

At our Baptism, the priest or deacon either poured water or immersed us three times, while stating, “[Name], I baptize you, in the name of the Father [dip], and of the Son [dip], and of the Holy Spirit [dip].” Baptism made us Christians. This holy water cleanses, renews, and refreshes us along our Christian journey. The Sign of the Cross is a mark of the One to whom we belong—to whom we are conformed—the Triune God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Having been washed, renewed, and conformed to the image of God, the newly baptized is now a Christian.

By dipping our hand into the holy water, we renew our baptismal covenant. We participate in the life of the one who calls us to a life of discipleship, whereby we carry forth the mission of Christ by renewing the face of the earth. It is in these baptismal waters that one journeys to the eucharistic table, where we renew our baptismal covenant each Sunday. We also pass these waters on our way out of the worship space as we take leave of one another in order to live the mission of Christ as faithful disciples.

It is for this reason of renewing our baptismal covenant that the placement of the baptismal font is typically close to the entrance of the worship space or in the narthex. Just as one enters the Christian faith through Baptism, so, too, do we enter the church by renewing our entrance into the Church. Some communities have built or renovated their worship spaces to make a place for a large font. Such fonts signify the lavish and flowing love of God for his people. Some older churches have little dishes of holy water—taken from the font—by other doors than the main entrance. While these are convenient, we are invited to enter the worship space through the main doors, walking to the font, dipping our hand in holy water, signing ourselves in the Sign of the Cross, and processing in our entrance journey to reunite ourselves to the Sunday assembly. The font is the place of Baptism and has pride of place in our worship spaces.

The blessing of baptismal water contains rich imagery. It states, “By the power of the Holy Spirit give to this water the grace of your Son, so that in the sacrament of baptism all those whom you have created in your likeness may be cleansed from sin and rise to a new birth of innocence by water and the Holy Spirit” (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, 91). The three persons of Divine Mystery work through baptismal waters to refresh and renew us in our call to carry out Christ’s mission in the world. ♦

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