

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BLESSED WATER AND HOLY WATER?

Question:

During a homily about doing battle against the devil, a priest [once] said that the greatest weapons were the Sacraments, [the prayer of] St. Michael [the Archangel], the Blessed Mother, holy water and blessed salt. He said to make sure it was blessed with the traditional blessing and that regular holy water was not as effective because its blessing is not preceded by an exorcism. Is the priest right, and is this the [current] Church teaching on holy water? This seems the rather fringe view of those who believe everything Catholic after Vatican II is inferior.

Answer:

There is [currently] no official teaching [within the universal Catholic Church] about the superiority of one sort of holy water over another. The opinion cited by the priest is a common one among exorcists [and those clergy who favor the pre-Second Vatican Council practices] and emerges from their experience that using solemnly blessed holy water vexes the demons during an exorcism more than simply blessed holy water.

Solemnly blessed holy water is mixed with blessed salt. [Individually] both the salt and the water are exorcised before they are blessed [and combined]. The purpose of an exorcism is to cast away any demonic presence before the blessing is conferred. Some theologians, including St. Thomas Aquinas, have held that exorcisms before certain blessings (and especially before baptism) increase the fruitfulness of what the blessing effects.

Exorcism or not, the water is still blessed, but the fruitfulness may be increased since the demons who might seek to interfere with some of the fruits of its being blessed have been sent away. {However} This remains in the realm of theological opinion and is not official Church teaching.

Even among the pre-1970 rituals [i.e., before the Second Vatican Council's completion], there were different types of holy water. The holy water we have been discussing is the holy water used for most blessings. But holy water for baptism (included not only salt, but also chrism), and it was blessed using different wording. Epiphany water was considered the most potent of holy water, because it was blessed once a year on the vigil of Epiphany and blessed using an extensive liturgy, similar to Vespers [the Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours]. It was mixed with exorcised salt and the exorcism over the water was lengthier. Hence, it was deemed more potent by many.

Thus, the idea of one holy water being more potent than another is a theological opinion that predates the [Second Vatican] council. One thing certainly to be avoided is the modern practice of some priests to bless holy water with a simple blessing. Whatever rite is used, old or new, exorcisms and salt or not, the full [prescribed] rite should be used.

(Source Reference: Our Sunday Visitor article, by Monsignor Charles Pope, dated March 20, 2019; Monsignor Pope is an ordained priest in the Archdiocese of Washington, DC and has spoken and authored many magazine articles and books on the subjects of Catholic liturgy; theology and catechetical instruction (<https://www.osvnews.com/2019/03/20/types-of-holy-water/>))