

COMPENDIUM
— *of* —
SACRAMENTALS



Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Photo by Mapi_1 / Shutterstock

COMPENDIUM
— *of* —
SACRAMENTALS

**An Encyclopedia of the Church's
Blessings, Signs, and Devotions**

WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY
SHAUN McAFEE

TAN Books
Gastonia, North Carolina

*Compendium of Sacramentals: An Encyclopedia of the Church's Blessing, Signs,
and Devotions* © 2023 Shaun McAfee

All rights reserved. With the exception of short excerpts used in critical review, no part of this work may be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in any form whatsoever, without the prior written permission of the publisher. Creation, exploitation and distribution of any unauthorized editions of this work, in any format in existence now or in the future—including but not limited to text, audio, and video—is prohibited without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible—Second Catholic Edition (Ignatius Edition), © 2006 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from the English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition, © 1994, 1997, 2000 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana–United States Catholic Conference, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved.

Cover Design by Caroline Green and Jordan Avery
Interior design by David Ferris, www.davidferrisdesign.com

Cover and interior images: All images are under public domain in the United States of America via Wikimedia Commons, unless otherwise attributed on pages 205–206.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023941858

ISBN: 978-1-5051-2817-8

Kindle ISBN: 978-1-5051-2818-5

ePUB ISBN: 978-1-5051-2819-2

Published in the United States by
TAN Books
PO Box 269
Gastonia, NC 28053

www.TANBooks.com

Printed in India

*This book is dedicated to Catholic families.
May all couples and their children grow in love
for the sacraments through the frequent and
pious use of sacramentals!*



Ordination and First Mass of St. John of Matha, by Vicente Carducho

C O N T E N T S

Introduction	1
I About Sacramentals	3
What Sacramentals Are.....	3
What Sacramentals Do	5
Blessings	7
Exorcisms	8
Devotions of Piety.....	9
Relics	10
Handling and Using Sacramentals	12
Indulgences.....	13
II Sacramental Gestures	17
The Sign of the Cross	17
Genuflections and Bowing	22
III Sacramental Signs.....	31
The Cross and Crucifix.....	31
Stations of the Cross.....	40
Holy Water.....	50
Vestments	58
Holy Medallions.....	68
Holy Oils, Salt, and Chalk.....	82
Scapulars.....	93
The Agnus Dei	103
Palms and Ashes.....	108
Candles and Incense.....	121
Church Bells.....	135



IV Sacramental Devotions	145
The Holy Rosary.....	145
Chaplet of Divine Mercy.....	160
Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows of Mary.....	166
Stations of the Cross.....	173
The Angelus.....	176
Divine Office	182
The Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.....	186
Conclusion	197
<i>Appendix: Further Reading.....</i>	<i>199</i>
<i>About the Author.....</i>	<i>203</i>
<i>Image Credits</i>	<i>205</i>



Candles burn in a votive offering. Photo by Matt Gush / Shutterstock

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Sacramentals are a vital part of the Catholic Church's rich tradition. They stem from some of the oldest acts of piety and are archived in the world's most important museums. For the daily life of a Catholic, sacramentals are indispensable. They enrich daily prayer and ritual devotion, and increase our faith. I have long been fascinated with sacramentals, and I have endeavored here in this compendium to discover and explain the facts, stories, backgrounds, and various uses for them.

Compendium of Sacramentals mirrors the Church in breaking down sacramentals into three categories: blessings, exorcisms, and forms of piety and devotion. Of course, these include the familiar physical objects we all know, such as rosaries; those will be explored as well. However, this book cannot possibly include an exhaustive list of sacramentals, as there are far too many in the history of the Church. This book, though, includes the most common, popular, and important sacramentals still in use—most of which are of ancient origin.

The chief aim of each chapter is to promote the use of sacramentals by highlighting them and explaining their origin and meaning. Of course, it is unrealistic for any reader to come away with a deep and affectionate devotion to each, or to immediately adorn their house with holy water fonts at every door. Thorough appreciation is the best takeaway I could hope for—so I reasonably expect some “jumping around” from chapter to chapter based on current interests, curious poking, and prompts from the Holy Spirit.

With that said, each chapter is laid out in a common fashion to systematically explain *what* the sacramental is, *how* to use it, its history and formation, interesting and important facts about it, safekeeping that must be observed, and, of course, any relevant prayers, blessings, or indulgences that go with it. Here and there, too, readers will find apologetics to help explain and defend the Faith effectively and with charity. Also prominently included, where possible, I have added references from older catechisms to show continuity with current teaching; this never fails to add a sense of pious reminiscence that our Faith does not just belong to us but is handed down from each generation to the next. Indeed, St. Paul asks us to, “Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thes 2:15).



Monstrance. Photo by Sidney de Almeida / Shutterstock

P A R T 1

About Sacramentals

Sacramentals are one of the most recognizable parts of the Catholic Faith. If a person were to say the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the word “Catholicism,” it would likely be a crucifix, a rosary, or something similar. These are sacramentals.

They range from some of the most precious items in the world to slips of string with knots made by children. With ornate details or simple materials, sacramentals stand among the most cherished objects a believer can own: a rosary obtained on a pilgrimage, a crucifix given at an infant’s baptism, a blessing from the pope, or a bottle of water drawn from a baptismal font in the Holy Land.

Cherished sacramentals are wonderful to own and use, but they are not common objects one plays with or discards without care. Nor are they “good luck charms.” Thus, equally important to their use is understanding what the Church teaches about their use, safekeeping, and vital laws on selling and destroying them.

What Sacramentals Are

Sacramentals are “sacred signs,” instituted by the Church, “which bear a resemblance to the sacraments.”¹ The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, further describes sacramentals by their ability to, “signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of

¹ Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), no. 60 (hereafter cited in the footnotes as *SC*).

the Church. By them men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy.”²

These definitions are brief, but they still help us understand what sacramentals are. They are “sacred signs,” which by their name relates them to the seven sacraments of the Church, but they are not sacraments themselves. Because they are “sacred signs” which “bear resemblance,” they lead us to the sacraments, preparing us to receive the sanctifying grace but not providing this grace in and by themselves.

“Holy Mother Church has, moreover, instituted sacramentals.” Ordinarily, the minister of sacramentals is a cleric—that is, deacon, priest, or bishop—“who has been provided with the requisite power.”³ Because they involve things that “bear a resemblance to the sacraments,” one might think there could be no end to the number of sacramentals. That’s understandable, and even the Church recognizes that “there is hardly any proper use of material things which cannot thus be directed toward the sanctification of men and the praise of God.” In this light, however, a rock could be used to help build a Catholic church or school, but the Church would never sanction its use as a devotional, in contrast to some misguided forms of therapy. Whereas the Church does authorize the use of rosaries, given their genuinely holy purpose. Clearly stated, then, sacramentals are only those things the Church authorizes. In short, a priest *could* bless many objects, but a blessed object does not become a sacramental simply by virtue of its being blessed. Rather, the Church must approve the form and function of the particular devotion and its associated material objects—for example, the beads used in the recitation of the Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Now, it is important to understand that sacramentals have been defined in several ways. The easiest way to understand them is to divide them into two different types: things we can hold and things we can actually do. Theologians have gone beyond this scope, however, and have further separated sacramentals into six groups based on their given purpose: *orans* for liturgical/public prayer or private prayer, such as chanting; *tinctus*, the application of holy water or oils (unctions); *edens*, the blessing of foods; *confessus*, the general declaration of faults recited in the Confiteor at Mass, prior to the reception of Holy Communion at Mass, and in the Divine Office; *dans*, better known as alms; and *benedicens*, papal and episcopal blessings of items such as candles, salt, ashes, and palms.⁴

This set of distinctions better elucidates that sacramentals are not limited to special objects but are also special *actions*. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* identifies

² *SC*, no. 60.

³ *Code of Canon Law*, canon 1168 (hereafter cited in the footnotes as *CIC*).

⁴ Fr. Henri Leclercq, “Sacramentals,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1912); as given at www.newadvent.org/cathen/13292d.htm.

three types of sacramentals: blessings, exorcisms, and forms of piety and devotions.⁵ For a blessing, think of the benediction the priest gives at the end of Mass, or that a bishop will give when visiting members of his diocese. An exorcism is a special ritual for expelling a demonic presence from an object, place, or person. A form of pious devotion, an example of which we've already explored, is the meditative prayer of the Holy Rosary, a devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or the use of holy water or a crucifix. Let's go a little deeper into each of these.

What Sacramentals Do

What does the Church say that sacramentals *really do*, though, if they only “bear resemblance” to sacraments, as the *Catechism* states? To understand sacramentals in this way, we must first understand what the Church teaches about the sacraments.

The seven sacraments of the Church “are efficacious signs of grace” that Christ has instituted.⁶ This means that the sacraments confer grace to the believer who is properly disposed to receive it. This effect of sanctifying grace is produced *ex opere operato*,



Founding Mass of the Order of the Trinity, by Don Juan Carreno de Miranda / © Photo Josse / Bridgeman Images

⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter cited in the footnotes as *CCC*) 1671–76.

⁶ *CCC* 1131.

a Latin phrase meaning “by the very fact of the action’s being performed.”⁷ In short, the sacraments effect sanctifying grace by virtue of the celebration of the sacrament itself, independent of the merits of the minister or the recipient, provided the merely human minister has proper intention.⁸ In *ex opere operato*, God, or Christ more specifically, is the effecting agent.

This efficaciousness of the sacraments demonstrates the chief difference between sacraments and sacramentals: sacramentals do not produce sanctifying grace *ex opere operato*, nor any other grace in this way.

Do the sacraments always confer grace on those who receive them?

The sacraments always confer grace provided they are received with the necessary dispositions.

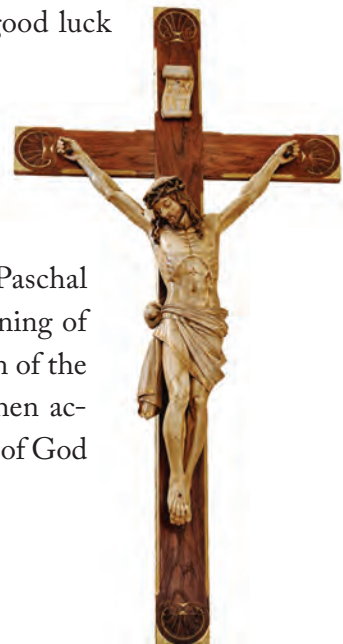
Who gave to the sacraments the power of conferring grace?

Jesus Christ by His passion and death gave to the sacraments the power of conferring grace.

—*Compendium of Christian Doctrine*, Pope St. Pius X (1905)

If sacraments are efficacious signs of sanctifying grace, sacramentals are conversely inefficacious, *in and of themselves*, since they “signify effects” and are merely related to the sacraments. Even though administering or using sacramentals does not have an immediate and indefectible effect, this does not mean they are futile, nor does it render them to nothing more than good luck charms. Sacramentals have a special efficacy of their own.

Sacramentals are specially equipped to teach the faithful about the realities of the divine. Every crucifix represents the reality that Christ died for the sins of all mankind. In the Mass, where the presence of a crucifix is always required, the crucifix recalls the glorious meaning of this Paschal Sacrifice, adjoining the Eucharistic meal with the true meaning of Calvary. Much the same is rightfully said about how the Sign of the Cross is more than a routine self-blessing before meals: when acknowledged properly, the words and gesture express the unity of God



⁷ CCC 1128.

⁸ CCC 1128.

in the mystery of the Trinity. In this way, sacramentals have a unique and powerful effect of teaching and inspiring.

Akin to this, and perhaps their most important effect, is how sacramentals properly dispose the hearts of the faithful. In other words, the hope is that the truths of our religion, conveyed in a more meaningful way with the presence and use of sacramentals, will foster a deeper faith in the believer.

This is the foremost effect of sacramentals and makes them highly advantageous and attractive to those wishing to become better poised in performing good works and religious devotion.

Benedictio Ante Prandium

*Mensæ cælestis participes faciat nos rex
æternæ gloriæ.*

“May the king of eternal glory
make us partakers of the heavenly table.”

—A monk’s blessing before a midday meal

Blessings

Blessings are the fundamental sacramental. Christians the world over understand blessings to indicate the imparting of goodwill or a gift. We even see this language in the Bible. Psalm 127 in the Douay Reims Bible says, “For thou shalt eat the labours of thy hands: blessed art thou, and it shall be well with thee” (127:2). This verse points to more than just a wish for goodwill; it expresses that someone will experience God’s blessing, given their faithful disposition (127:1). A sacramental blessing, then, is one that consecrates or sanctifies a person, place, or thing.

Sacramental blessings are either invocative—in which God’s goodness is invoked to bring forth some spiritual good—or constitutive, which is the intentional sanctifying of an object for a divine purpose.⁹ The disparity between the two is

Why does the Catholic Church bless so many things?

We bless churches and other places set aside for divine service, altars, chalices, vestments, etc., by way of devoting them to holy uses. We bless our meats and other inanimate things which God has given us for use, that we may use them with moderation, in a manner agreeable to God’s institution; that they may be serviceable to us, and that the devil may have no power to abuse them to our prejudice. We bless candles, salt, water, etc., by way of begging of God that such as religiously use them may obtain his blessing, etc.

—*The Catholic Christian Instructed*, Richard Challoner (1737)

⁹ Fr. Patrick Morrisroe, “Blessing,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 2 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1907); as given at www.newadvent.org/cathen/02599b.htm.



Sacrament of Marriage, from the Crucifixion, by Vrancke van der Stockt c.1460 / Bridgeman Images

to them, their inspiring power, or their ability to prepare us for receiving the sacraments.

Exorcisms

We don't need to turn to Hollywood movies to understand exorcisms. Famous Catholic clergy of modern times can testify to dramatic, preternatural events, with affirmation from impartial eyewitnesses. But these accounts are exceptions to the norm. For the vast majority of clergy, an exorcism is an ordinary and familiar rite.

An exorcism, also a type of sacramental, is the direct purging of, or protection from, evil spirits. Exorcisms are applied to persons, places, or objects. The *Catechism* explains that, "When the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and withdrawn from his dominion, it is called exorcism."¹⁰ Christ gave the apostles power over demons and commanded seventy of his followers to go abroad with this power (see Lk 10:17–20), a divine sacramental that is effectual only with the power of authority and faith (see Mt 17:14–20).

There are two general types of exorcisms: minor exorcisms and major exorcisms. Most people might pass through life thinking they've never witnessed an exorcism,

dramatic. Invocative blessings, whether a child is blessing their food or a deacon is blessing a young married couple, impart a command to raise up a person or object to be spiritually enhanced: a meal to be nutritious, a marriage to produce love, a field to produce a yield. But none of these fundamentally changes the character of the person, place, or object. Conversely, constitutive blessings consecrate objects enduringly, so that such objects may permanently be used for sacred purposes: a chalice is blessed before use, an altar is consecrated, etc.

What binds sacramental blessings into one group is the Church's authority and their ability to lead us to the sacraments, either by their relatedness

¹⁰ CCC 1673.

What do we mean by exorcisms?

The rights and prayers instituted by the Church for the casting out devils, or restraining them from hurting persons, disquieting places, or abusing any of God's creatures to our harm.

—*The Catholic Christian Instructed*, Richard Challoner (1737)

but anyone present at a Catholic Rite of Baptism has seen an exorcism. In this rite, the priest or deacon includes a *minor* exorcism, and three are included in the Extraordinary Form of Baptism. Because the rite is written without presumption of age, the exorcism is included to be sure the devil and all evil spirits are driven out of the person prior to their receiving the new life of Christ which is efficaciously received in the Sacrament of Baptism. A *major* exorcism—known as a *solemn* or *major exorcism*—is an elevated rite, which is only used after an extensive investigation has taken place to determine whether a person is demonically possessed, and then a bishop authorizes a ministerial priest to perform the exorcism.

Devotions of Piety

St. Thomas Aquinas defines a devotion as nothing else but the will to give oneself readily to things concerning the service of God.¹¹ Sacramentals in this category include the many devotions and individual objects approved by the Church. These devotions and objects are vital to the Christian life because they best dispose us to receive and participate in the life of Christ. Hence, Catholics from all parts of the world, and within every generation, have some natural attachment to a sacramental that has benefitted their spiritual growth or renewed their personal relationship with Christ.

Since the beginning, Christians have devoted themselves to specific causes and have identified certain objects to signal and elevate their religious convictions. Almost immediately, Christians used

It isn't uncommon to receive an objection that exorcisms lack biblical support because they are not found in the Old Testament. But this is not necessarily true, nor is it problematic. In the Old Testament, we find evidence of exorcism when the devout and wealthy Israelite named Tobias employed the archangel Raphael to expel a demon with the ashes of the heart and liver of a fish, as Raphael had instructed two chapters prior (6:18–19; 8:3).

Regardless of what we find in the Old Testament, there is a clear-cut reason we find a greater number of (and emphasis on) exorcisms in the New Testament. We must be mindful that Christ gave this power to exorcise spirits—His power—as a witness to foster belief in Him and His Church (Mt 11:2–6; Mk 16:17).

¹¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II–II, q. 82, a. 1.

the Sign of the Cross. Tertullian, a Christian writer of the second and third centuries, wrote about the Christians of his time: “At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out . . . we trace upon the forehead the sign.”¹²

Other pious devotions arose early on. The *Via Dolorosa*—the processional route of Christ in carrying His Cross to Calvary—was used by pilgrims, and the earliest burial sites of persecuted Christians include carvings of the *ichthys*, the simple mark of and word for a fish, a Greek acrostic in which the five letters affirm belief in Christ: *Iesous Christos Theou Yios Soter*, (“Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior”).¹³ The fish already had importance in Christianity, given that Jesus proclaims He would remain in His tomb for three days before His resurrection, as Jonah was in the belly of a fish for three days (Jon 1–2; Mt 12:38–42). Through the centuries, these devotions grew into sacramentals recognized by the Church: the Stations of the Cross, the Holy Rosary, the crucifix and crosses, the scapular, holy oils, candles, and so many more. All of these items and devotions, in one way or another, orient us to Christ and dispose us to receive the sacraments with more appreciation and an increase of faith.

Relics

The Catholic Church recognizes three distinct classes of relics. A first-class relic is a part of the corporeal body of a saint, while a second-class relic is an object the saint used during their lifetime. An item touched to a first-class relic, oftentimes a sacramental belonging to a person, is known as a third-class relic.

If the clothes, the kerchiefs, the shadow of the saints, before they departed this life, banished disease and restored vigour, who will venture to deny that God works the same wondrous works by the sacred ashes, the bones, and other relics of the saints? This was declared by the dead body accidentally let down into the grave of Elisha, and which, on touching the body of the prophet, was instantly restored to life.

—*The Catechism of the Council of Trent* (1566)¹⁵

Relics are not included as sacramentals because they are not “instituted by the Church.” As *Sacrosanctum Concilium* explains, “Holy Mother Church has, moreover, instituted sacramentals. They . . . are obtained through the intercession of the Church.”¹⁴

The Church’s blessing does not institute relics. The Church does canonize saints and declares the authenticity of their related relics, particularly first-class relics, but such actions do not, in and of themselves, fundamentally alter the mortal remains of a saint. Therefore, relics

¹² Tertullian, *The Chaplet (De Corona)*, ch. 3.

¹³ Fr. Maurice Hassett, “Symbolism of the Fish,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 6 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1909); as given at www.newadvent.org/cathen/06083a.htm.

¹⁴ *SC*, no. 60.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Acts 19:11–12; 2 Kings 13:20–21.



Reliquary containing a relic of St. Marianne. Photo by Dan Shachar / Shutterstock

are not sacramentals in the proper use of the term, but they do belong to this conversation because they are relevant to the life of piety in the Catholic tradition. For that reason, this chapter is a good place to discuss them.

Catholics venerate relics but do not worship them. The reason Catholics venerate relics lies in the Christian teaching that the bodies of the saints on earth were living members of mystical Body of Christ (see Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12–27; Eph 3:6, 4:15–16; 5:23; Col 1:18; 1:24), and, as such, were temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19). Catholics believe that, through these relics, God bestows many benefits on the faithful, including healings and other miraculous events. The Church, therefore, encourages the veneration of relics, but it does not force this act of veneration upon the conscience of any Catholic.

Relics have a special relation to sacramentals, principally because many relics are, in fact, third-class sacramentals: usually blessed rosaries, crucifixes, or other physical objects. Private and public veneration of relics remain a distinctive part of the expression of faith in the Catholic Church. The *Catechism* explains, “The religious sense of the Christian people has always found expression in various forms of piety surrounding the Church’s sacramental life, such as the veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, [and] processions.”¹⁶

¹⁶ CCC 1674.



Poland, 1971. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II) process, taking Saint Stanislaus' relics from Wawel to Skalka in Cracow. / Forum / Bridgeman Images

Handling and Using Sacramentals

As we have learned, the Church teaches that sacramentals are special objects set aside for acts of worship, devotion, and good Christian piety. Because a sacramental is an object reserved for a special use the Church designates, sacramentals carry the au-

thority of the Church, which also governs their approval and handling. To observe these guidelines properly, there are a few ground rules to understand.

Sacramentals are more than heirlooms and home decor: they are sacred objects, and some are consecrated to serve in the Church's highest liturgy. Therefore, our conscience is commanded to treat them with dignity and respect. *The Code of Canon Law* states that "sacred objects, which are designated for divine worship by dedication or blessing, are to be treated reverently and are not to be employed for profane or inappropriate use even if they are owned by private persons."¹⁷ This includes any treatment that would trivialize or put the object in risk of being broken.

We must also be conscious of how we employ the non-physical sacramentals of blessing and exorcism. For example, the *Sign of the Cross* must be made as a true sign of faith and piety: intentionally, prayerfully, and uniformly when with others, rather than quickly, sloppily, or chaotically. Blessings at mealtime—hopefully not the only time a family prays together—should be said with sincerity. Genuflections and bows, also raised to the dignity of being a sacramental, should be made with the same inner sense of candor.

The Church provides other firm rules. While sacramentals are obviously sold in Catholic bookshops and similar places, a *blessed* sacramental should not be sold, lest both parties may be guilty of simony. If a special blessing or exorcism is performed, it is reasonable and permissible to offer a donation, as a family might offer with a baptism, but nobody is under any compulsion to do so since the Church does not barter the things of God.

Of course, sacramentals like crucifixes and rosaries eventually break, fall apart, rip, or become corroded. Candles burn down, and scapulars rip and tear. If a sacramental

¹⁷ *CIC*, can. 1171.



Photo: © Fred de Noyelle / Godong / Bridgeman Images

reaches a state beyond repair or past its effective use, the object should be disposed of properly. Even in a tattered state, the object has been blessed by the Church's intercession and should be treated correctly. Proper disposal should be reverent, either by burning the sacramental or by burial. This method of disposal shows proper reverence, but it also prevents the sacramental

from falling into the wrong hands, hands which might desecrate it. To be clear, desecrated sacramentals should be disposed of in the same manner.

Indulgences

The Church defines an indulgence as “the remission before God of the temporal punishment due sins already forgiven as far as their guilt is concerned.”¹⁸ Because of this unique and abiding effect, the Church commends and encourages the seeking of indulgences by all the faithful,¹⁹ and they are almost always associated with a sacramental blessing, devotion, or object.

There are two types of indulgences one can obtain, either for oneself or for a member of the faithful departed in purgatory: partial and plenary. A plenary indulgence remits all temporal punishment required to cleanse the soul from attachment to anything but God, and a partial indulgence remits only part of the temporal punishment due to sin.

Special conditions are provided by the Church to obtain a plenary indulgence. There are three standard actions to perform, and a particular work that varies according to each. The three constants are a sacramental confession, receiving Holy Communion, and praying for the intentions of the Holy Father.²⁰ All of these are to be performed within several days of each other, if not at the same time.

There are a number of ways to obtain either type of indulgence, and these are found for the most part in the *Enchiridion of Indulgences*, the Church's governing text on the how, when, and where of obtaining indulgences (others may be attached to a specific event such as solemn prayers during a conclave). When Church rules on gaining an indulgence speak of being “properly disposed,” they refer to the reverent fulfillment of the required actions.

¹⁸ Pope St. Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution on Indulgences *Indulgentiarum Doctrina* (January 1, 1967), norms, no. 1.

¹⁹ CCC 1032; see 1471–73.

²⁰ Pope Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, norms, no. 7.

Do sacramentals remit venial sin?

A common belief for many Catholics is that sacramentals (such as holy water) remit venial sin. The internet's vast "answers" are full of these references too. But this must be clarified. Sacramentals in and of themselves do not remit venial sins. Remember, they have no power *ex opere operato*, and they surely will not remit the sin in and by themselves.

However, there is a great power with sacramentals that can lead to the remission of sins. Items that convict our hearts—like a crucifix—or provide illumination to minds—like the Stations of the Cross during Lent—and strengthen our true love for God, will confidently work to cause greater sorrow for our sins. This conversion back to God with authentic sorrow for our sins is contrition, which brings us grace, and it is this grace that remits venial sins. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes this clear: "When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called 'perfect.' Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible."²¹ When a sacramental causes us to achieve such sorrow for our sins, they then have helped us gain forgiveness. However, as the *Catechism* provides, mortal sins must still be confessed in "sacramental confession as soon as possible."

²¹ CCC 1452.



Christ on the Cross with Mary and St. John (c.1457-1464), by Rogier van der Weydeno