

Why Do We Bless Ourselves With Holy Water Upon Entering the Worship Space?



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

At our Baptism, the priest or deacon either poured water or dipped us into the water three times, while saying, “[Name], I baptize you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Baptism made us Christians. This holy water still cleanses, renews, and refreshes us along our Christian journey today. The Sign of the Cross is a mark of the One to whom we belong—to whom we have been chosen—the Three-In-One God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Having been washed and renewed, the newly baptized is now a Christian.

By dipping our right hand into holy water every time we enter church, we *renew* our baptismal covenant, or promises. We recall and *renew* our participation in the life of the One who calls us to be disciples, carrying forth the mission of Christ by renewing the face of the Earth. It is only through baptismal waters that one is able to journey to the Eucharistic table. We also pass these waters on our way out of the worship space as we take leave of one another in order to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed throughout the upcoming week. We return again the following weekend and *renew* ourselves in these waters. Finally, we stop at these waters before our own funeral to *renew* what was promised to us in baptism—eternal life with Jesus Christ.

It is for this reason of renewing our baptismal promises that the placement of the baptismal font is typically close to the entrance of the worship space. Just as one enters our faith at his or her Baptism, so, too, do we enter the church building by renewing those same promises. Some communities, such as ours, 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 dishes of holy water—taken from the font—by doors other than the main entrance. While these are convenient and sometimes unavoidable, it fails to connect our lives to the present. ***We are invited to enter the worship space through the main doors, walk to the font, dip our hand in the holy water which we were baptized in, sign ourselves with the Cross, and process in our entrance journey to reunite ourselves to the Sunday Assembly.*** This is not drama or theatrics! We must go out of our way to “find the water” because we are to *renew* our own baptism. If it is crowded around the font—so be it! How great a sight it is that everyone wants to *renew* their Baptism as a community? Holy water fonts at various doors are convenient, but they miss the point. The remembrance of our baptism is to be considered above convenience. Even if we cannot remember the day of our baptism, we remember the vows made for us on that day. This is what we renew when we go to the font for holy water.

The blessing of baptismal water contains rich imagery. It prays, “Lord God Almighty... by [this water] you give us a new birth and renew us in holiness. May this water remind us of our baptism, and let us share in the joy of all who have been baptized at Easter.” (*Sacramentary*, 359C). The three persons of Trinity work through the holy water we bless ourselves with to refresh and *renew* us in our call to carry out Christ’s mission to each and every person we meet.

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