

## **What are Sacramentals?**

Sacramentals are signs, things, and actions, etc. in the Church that often look like little sacraments but they are different. Unlike sacraments they are not instituted directly by Christ and they do not in themselves give sanctifying grace like sacraments do.

Sacramentals originate in Church practice. They help us by faith to be more open to God's special help and to use this grace better. They are our visible prayer of faith and they help us take better advantage of the merits Jesus earned for us on the cross, but they do not initiate this grace in us.

Some examples of the hundreds of sacramentals in Catholic practice are: holy water, religious medals, rosaries, holy cards and sacred icons, Stations of the Cross, meal prayers, blessing of a home, vigil lights, vows of a monk or nun, relics, statues, etc. Sacramentals face us toward Jesus alive in His Church. They are prayers that use symbols besides or instead of words. They are signs that remind us of the things of God. They are aids to better prayer. They witness to our faith. They make it uncomfortable for the devil and protect us from his evil.

Sacramentals have no power of their own. They should not be confused with magic, superstition, or good luck. Wearing a blessed medal, for example, is a powerful prayer of faith, involving the blessing of the Church and trusting in the goodness of God. By the faith of the Church blessed objects can inhibit the power of evil and make us more open to the blessings of God, but they have no supernatural power in themselves. They depend on our faith and the faith of the Church. Sacramental objects should be blessed by an ordained Catholic clergyman.

We modern Catholics need to take better advantage of our holy sacramental traditions. It would be a big step in the renewal of our holy faith if each home had a crucifix and icons of Jesus, Mary, and patron saints, etc. prominently displayed and revered. Holy water should be in habitual use and children protected in faith with blessed medals. Sacramentals are part of our holy Catholic way. They make a difference.