

Reflection for Thursday 14th January 2021

The Epiphany blessing of homes with chalk. It is a powerful blessing that lasts the whole year.

Each year around the feast of the Epiphany many parishes throughout the world participate in an annual blessing of chalk. It is an ancient tradition that not only places God at the entrance of your home, it places your entire family under his protection.

The Epiphany blessing of chalk and homes is a centuries old tradition where priests would visit each home in their parish after the Feast of the Epiphany. Over time it became more difficult to accomplish such a feat as parishes became larger and larger and priests were stretched thin. For this reason it became an accepted tradition that a member of the household is able to lead this blessing in place of the priest.

The blessing has biblical roots, deeply tied to the Passover in the book of Exodus.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt ... “take some of the blood [of the lamb], and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it ... The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.”
(cf. Exodus 12:1-13)

It is no coincidence that the Epiphany blessing is traditionally written on the lintel of the main doorway and even some of the prayers echo God’s words of protection that he gave to Moses. While the Epiphany blessing was not given in the same manner as it was to Moses, the Church provides it for our own spiritual benefit. The Church desires our salvation and so gives us beautiful sacramentals to assist us along the path to Eternal Life.

Traditionally a priest blesses chalk on the Feast of the Epiphany by saying the following prayer (from the *Roman Ritual*):

Bless, + O Lord God, this creature, chalk, and let it be a help to mankind. Grant that those who will use it with faith in your most holy name, and with it inscribe on the doors of their homes the names of your saints, Casper, Melchior, and Baltassar, may through their merits and intercession enjoy health in body and protection of soul; through Christ our Lord.

The chalk maybe distributed after Mass. Parishioners then take the chalk home and use it while invoking God's blessing upon their home.

It is a beautiful blessing, one that brings many graces upon those who practice it in faith and is an added protection against any spiritual enemies that may be lurking around.

The Blessing

Once you acquire the blessed chalk, either a priest or another member of the household can bless the home in the following manner (adapted from the *Roman Ritual*):

Upon entering the house [or at the front door]:

Priest/Head of Household: Peace be to this house.

All: And to all who dwell herein.

Priest: From the east came the Magi to Bethlehem to adore the Lord; and opening their treasures they offered precious gifts: gold for the great King, incense for the true God, and myrrh in symbol of His burial.

During the Magnificat, the room is sprinkled with holy water and incensed.

All: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour

for he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.

After this is completed:

*All: From the east came the Magi to Bethlehem to adore the Lord;
and opening their treasures they offered precious gifts: gold for the
great King, incense for the true God, and myrrh in symbol of His
burial.*

*Priest: Our Father Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy
Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us
this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive
those who trespass against us. And lead and lead us not into
temptation,*

All: But deliver us from evil.

Priest: All they shall come from Sheba

All: Bringing gold and frankincense.

Priest: O Lord, hear my prayer.

All: And let my cry come unto Thee.

Priest:

Let us pray. O God, who by the guidance of a star didst on this day manifest Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we who know Thee by faith may also attain the vision of Thy glorious majesty. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Priest: Be enlightened, be enlightened, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee— Jesus Christ born of the Virgin Mary.

All: And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light and kings in the splendour of thy rising, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon thee.

Priest: Let us pray. Bless, O Lord God almighty, this home, that in it there may be health, purity, the strength of victory, humility, goodness and mercy, the fulfilment of Thy law, the thanksgiving to God the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. And may this blessing remain upon this home and upon all who dwell herein. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

After the prayers of the blessing are recited, walk through the house and bless each room by sprinkling with Epiphany/holy water and incensing it.

Take the blessed chalk and first write the initials of the three Wise Men, connected with Crosses, over the inside of your front door (on the lintel, if possible). Then write the year, breaking up the numbers and the year so that they fall on both sides of the initials. It should look like this, for example

20 C+M+B 21

with the “20” being the millennium and century, the “C” standing for the first Wise Man, Caspar, the “M” standing for Melchior, the “B” standing for Balthasar, and the “20” standing for the decade and

year. It is also popularly believed that the Kings' initials stand for "Christus mansionem benedicat" ("Christ bless this house").

This is one example of many traditions within the Church which have been lost over the last 60 years. These traditions are slowly returning as faithful Catholics are rediscovering the spiritual riches which the Church has in her storehouse of prayers and sacramentals. Another such tradition is ember days which I will cover in a few weeks time.

In the meantime, use these Epiphany blessings for your home and family even without the priest or the chalk as they will help protect us during the conflict with the coronavirus over the next few months.

Deacon Kevin