

Why?

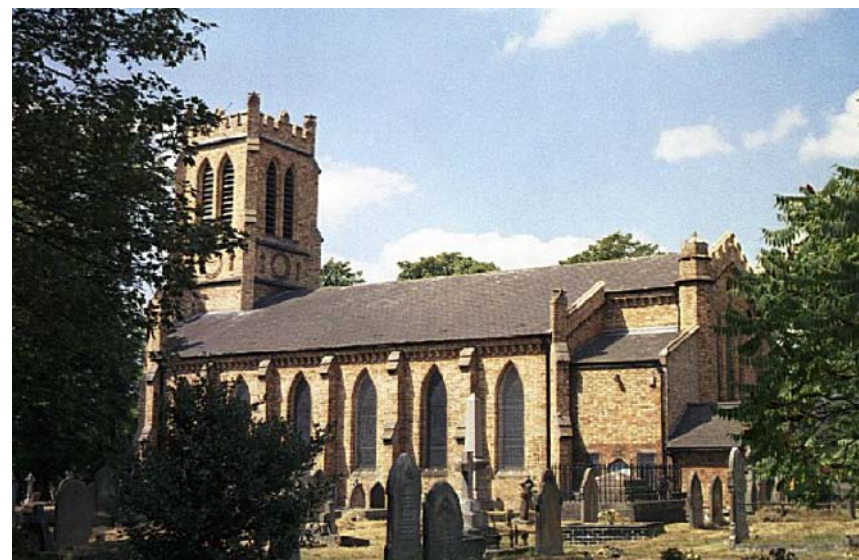
Worship and Personal Devotion



Reverend Canon Paul Tongue

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Why Do We Use Candles?

1. To Signify Christ as the Light of the World

Torches or lights on either side of a Cross point to the Cross, and He who died on the Cross; they point to him as the light of the world.

For this reason, it seems right to light Altar Candles on either side of the Altar Cross during all services.

2. To Signify the Presence of the Living Lord, the Light of the World, in the Sacrament of Holy Communion

This is the main significance today of candles on or near the Altar at all Communion Services. The living flame of the candle points to the living light of Christ. The flame of the candle is so obviously a living thing, I can see no justification for the use of electric bulbs in imitation candles. If the living flame of the candle is not apparent then most of the symbolism is lost.

The same significance attaches to the lamp or other light perpetually burning in front of, or near, the place where the Sacrament of Holy Communion is kept safely locked away for reception by the sick and housebound. The perpetual light (usually white) points the casual visitor to the Sacramental presence, and reminds the faithful, lest they may forget.

The same significance attaches to lights held in the area of the Altar during the Prayer of Thanksgiving in the Mass

3. Accompanying the Book of Gospels.

A way of pointing to the importance and significance of the Gospel is to hold lights on either side of the book during the reading. Here again, Christ, the Light of the World, reveals himself to us.

In some Churches (though not in our own) candles are placed on either side of the Lectern, or built into it, for the same reason. Of course, originally, these candles were needed to read the Bible in the dark or gloom.

4. The Paschal (Easter) Candle

In many Churches the advent of Easter is proclaimed by the ceremonial lighting of the Easter Candle on Easter Even or at dawn on Easter Day. "Jesus Christ, the light of the world, lives, and we live in him." That is the message it signifies as it stands prominently at the front of the Church throughout Eastertide.

After Whitsunday, the candle resumes its normal position next to the Font, proclaiming the same message, particularly to those who are baptised. Those baptised are given a small candle lit from the Paschal Candle - "Receive this light. This is to show that you have passed from darkness to light. Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father."

5. Candles Around Statues of the Saints

These point to three things.

First, they emphasise the fact that the particular Saint has been a shining light and example to the world of his or her own generation, and often also to generations that follow.

Secondly, they emphasise the fact that the Communion of Saints, that the Saints are very much alive in God's world and that they are united with us in our worship, - "with all who stand before you in earth and heaven, we worship you, Father Almighty."

Thirdly, they emphasise the fact that the Saints not only worship with us, they pray with us and for us. We ask for their prayers as we ask our fellow Christians in this life for their help and prayers.

It is a natural progression from this last fact to the lighting of 'Votive Candles', usually on a rack in front of a statue of Mary. Many hesitate to do this because of its misuse in the past. There has been a tendency to superstition. The lighting of the candle must always be an action accompanying prayer. Without the prayer, it is superstition or magic. With the prayer it is nothing more (or less) than an outward expression

of prayer (as kneeling is). It is entirely in the hands of the individual whether he expresses himself in this way or not. The lighting of the candle not only has meaning for the person who lights it, but the light itself acts as a witness to others that prayer has, and is being made. A church with votive candles burning (like Worcester Cathedral on my last few visits) speaks more readily to the human condition that this is not just called 'a house of prayer' but that prayer has been and is in progress at this very moment.

We have a rack in front of a statue of Our Lady of Walsingham where votive candles may safely be lit. The candles are available at a cost of 15p each, which covers the cost of the candle.



Why Do We Use Vestments?

The robes worn for the Eucharist are an adaptation of the ordinary clothes worn at the time of the Roman Empire. When those clothes were no longer worn in everyday usage, priests continued to wear them. It was a gradual process over centuries. Gradually the clothes were left in Church and simply put on for the services. It was almost, therefore, by accident that they have come to be associated with priesthood and the Eucharist.

The first vestments to be put on are always white - a symbol of purity. In the Eucharist we are dealing with holy things. For this same reason, those assisting at the Altar in any way traditionally wear white garments.

The stole (the long coloured strip of material placed around the neck) has become a badge of office. It is presented to a man at his Ordination when he is made a Deacon and worn diagonally across the body to signify a Deacon. When the man is ordained Priest, the stole is ceremonially untied at the Ordination and worn in the manner to which we are accustomed. This signifies Priesthood. The Bishop wears it in exactly the same way because he never ceases to be a Priest.

The origins of the stole are the towels that slaves used to wear round their necks. When bending down (or kneeling) they would use the towel to wipe the feet of guests, or their masters. The Lord himself wore a towel (round his waist) and did the same to his disciples at the Last Supper. The stole, is therefore, seen as a symbol of the fact that the Deacon, Priest and Bishop are to be servants (slaves) to the people of God.

The top garment (the chasuble) is, in some ways, the least important and varies greatly in size and shape, according to fashion. It is not altogether helpful that some of the full fashions almost hide the white under garments and, particularly, hide the stole. The chasuble is usually decorated in some symbolic way and tends to emphasise some of the significance through the different colours used.

Finally, the black cassock worn by most Priests in many different situations is of no special significance other than as an easy means of identification. Part of its significance is that it covers up and, to some extent, hides the individualism of the Priest and proclaims to all that he is a Priest of the Church.

Why Do We Use Different Colours?

The colours are intended to help us in our observance of the Christian year and of the different aspects of the Christian faith. Often the colours are supported by other visual effects - flowers or the lack of them, artistic embroidery and also, often these days, banners on pillars. The use of colours varies greatly throughout the world and we follow a number of traditions which are purely English, based on the uses found in Hereford and Salisbury in the Middle Ages.

A brief summary of the different colours follows:-

White or Gold

These are the festival colours and denote happy times. They are used at Christmas and Easter, on many of the greatest saint's days (except when red is considered more suitable) and on all occasions of great significance to individual Christian people - Baptism, Confirmation, Weddings, Ordination.

Red

Red is used in three main ways. First, to denote a saint who has died for the faith (the colour of blood spilt in the name of Christ).

Secondly, red is associated with the Holy Spirit (i.e. Whitsun), the Disciples' description of the flames of Pentecost must undoubtedly be the origin of this (we still think of fire engines as red).

Thirdly, red is used in association with the spilling of Jesus' own blood for us and is often now the colour used on Good Friday. In some churches, like our own, rich red vestments are used for Martyrs and the Holy Spirit and plain red for Good Friday and Passiontide.

Purple

Purple is used as a sombre colour at times of reflection and preparation for great festivals. Advent (before Christmas) and Lent (before Easter) are two such times. Purple is also the colour associated most with funerals and prayer for the departed. It is often used in preference to black, although we still have black vestments and use them on occasions.

Sackcloth

The Salisbury tradition of using sackcloth during lent is followed in our church. The symbolism goes right back to the Jewish custom of putting on sackcloth and pouring ashes over your head as a sign of contrition. Lent is a time when we are encouraged to acknowledge our sins and repent.

Green

It is tempting to say that green is used when no other colour is appropriate. It has a significance of its own in terms of growth, and seems eminently suitable for occasions like Harvest Thanksgiving but it is used on other occasions in the year when one of the other colours is inappropriate.

Blue

Blue has come to be associated with Mary. Whenever she is depicted in stained glass, in statues or paintings, she usually manages to be shown in a blue dress. This is the reason for the blue altar hangings which are used for most of the year on the Lady Altar of our church.

This use of colour is part of the Catholic principle of using all our faculties in our worship. What we see about us can speak just as loudly to our hearts and minds as the words we use.



Why Do We Use Incense?

In the Church of England, the use of incense is, without doubt, the most controversial optional extra used in worship. Let us be clear that it is entirely optional, and of the twenty or so services every week in our own Parish Church, for example, incense is only used regularly at two services.

It is a natural progression of two main things.

First, we think it important in our worship to use all our faculties and senses. We use our bodies (standing, sitting, kneeling); we use our voices (speaking and singing); we use our eyes (for what is done and how it is done is just as important as what is said); we use our taste (eating and drinking at Communion); we use our touch (water at Baptism, laying on of hands in Confirmation, shaking hands at the Peace, laying on of hands with the sick). Why then should we make an exception of our sense of smell?

If then we are to use our sense of smell, why not use what has been used throughout Christian history, and used by Judaism before that, and by many other world religions? You might well say that the use of incense to signify the holy, to signify something of God, is universal. No serious alternative has ever been suggested, to my knowledge.

To provide the right sort of smell does not involve incense being seen to be used. Joss sticks burning or hot charcoal and incense burning in a quiet corner of the Church would provide the smell. A blind person would be conscious of where he was as much as anyone else. An association of this sort of sort of smell with worship can be valuable in itself, and of course the smell lingers in the building for casual visitors during the week.

Secondly, we accept the use of all kinds of visual symbols or aids in our worship.

Incense has traditionally been used in the Christian Church as a visual symbol as well as simply a smell. This immediately raises the question

of how it is best used and what is a meaningful symbol for twenty first century man. In the age of television, we rely heavily on the visual, so it does not seem inappropriate to use some form of visual presentation in Church worship.

If we accept this argument about visual symbolism, then incense must be seen to be used. The first symbol is related to the visible smoke. Rising steadily upwards, as it does if the draughts allow, it has always symbolised the prayers of the faithful rising to the throne of God.

Further to this, there is what is called the 'liturgical use of incense', when it is seen to be swung at particular objects or people. This is a device for drawing attention to particular things or people, and associating them very much with God (incense points us always to God).

The 'holy place' in the Church, where God does his wonderful and mysterious "thing", day by day and week by week, is the Altar. At the beginning of Mass, and during the 'Magnificat' at Evensong, the Altar is hallowed with incense, pointing to the fact already emphasised by its central position in the Church, that it is the 'Holy Place'.

The Bible is the 'holy book', and if we can choose one part to be more important than the rest, we must choose the Gospels, that tell us so directly of Jesus, his words and deeds. This distinction is already made by the fact that we stand for the Gospel and sit for the other readings. Censing the book of Gospels at the beginning of the Gospel serves to emphasise the fact that the Bible is holy (God speaks to us through it) and in particular we must pay attention to the Gospels.

At the end of the Gospel, the Preacher is censed (incense is 'swung', 'thrown' in his direction). This serves to point to the fact that God calls men to the Priesthood, and part of that calling is to preach and proclaim the Good News. God speaks through the Preacher as well as the Bible. The use of incense points to this fact.

The Altar, the Bible, the Preacher are all "set apart" by God for his special purpose, and the use of incense helps to point to this. In the same way, as soon as bread and wine are placed on the Altar, they are

"set apart" for the special purpose of God. So incense is used over the gifts of bread and wine now on the Altar.

Then the Celebrant (the Presiding Priest) is censed. He is called by God to this special function within the life of Christ's family, the Church. He is "set apart", and this is acknowledged. Then all the faithful present are censed. God in Christ calls all men and women, boys and girls to be "set apart", to be holy. All are called to be saints. The use of incense is intended to remind us all of this.

The incense remains near the Altar throughout the long prayer of Thanksgiving. It is used at all three points in the prayer when the sacred gifts of bread and wine are held aloft for all to see and adore. In the same way, incense is used at the Service of Benediction when the Sacrament is prominently displayed in the Monstrance for all to see and adore.

Finally, the use of incense to lead processions is seen partly as symbolic - purifying the air, particularly on occasions when the Sacrament is carried. It also had the practical advantage in the old days of covering up all kinds of smells from open sewers, etc. I cannot really justify its use today, except in processions of the Sacrament. A matter for discussion with the Altar Servers!



Why Do We Make the Sign of the Cross?

The origins of the sign of the cross may well lie in the renewal of the Baptismal Cross. More usually today the sign of the cross is not made just on the forehead, but across the whole of the front of the torso - from the forehead to the navel, and then from one shoulder to another.

It must be seen as a personal, private devotion, even when used during public services. It does not matter a scrap what other people do; worshippers should not feel intimidated to conform to some kind of general rule. Whether they use this devotion less, or more than others, or not at all, is simply a matter of personal choice.

It follows that I can only offer my personal use of this devotion as a suggestion for you to consider, and with which to experiment. You will need to use this devotion regularly for at least six months at particular points in your private or public prayers, to know if the devotion is going to be helpful or meaningful to you. Inevitably, at first, much thought is given to the sheer mechanics of making the sign of the cross. Until this stage is overcome, the exercise is not likely to prove spiritually beneficial.

I offer below a purely personal list of priorities in terms of my own spiritual use of the sign of the cross.

1. Immediately before receiving Communion.

When coming to the point of Communion, the mind and the heart are so full of the wonder and the mystery of what is happening, that words fail. There is a mixture of feelings - unworthiness and commitment despite doubt. The sign of the cross speaks to me at this point of commitment to Christ -

"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief."

"Lord, you come to me; help me commit myself to you."

Whether the sign of the cross is used before receiving both the Body and Blood of the Lord, or simply once is something you must work out for yourself.

2. At the beginning of a time of private prayer.

When bringing oneself consciously into the presence of the living Lord, at the beginning of a time of prayer, there seems to be the need for an act of commitment, an act of faith. The sign of the cross can say this without words. For some, the words "In the name of the father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit", fulfil the same function on their own. For me the words and the sign of the cross belong together. As well as a personal act of faith, they seem to dedicate, to set apart the next few minutes for a special purpose, - a legitimate drawing apart from the world to consciously be with and talk with God.

3. At the beginning of a service

The order of Mass we use begins with the Invocation "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The same considerations apply as in item 2 above. For some, the words will be sufficient; others will accompany the words with the sign of the cross.

4. When looking at the Lord's Body and/or Blood

It is the tradition in many churches, including our own, for the Sacrament to

be held up very high for all to see. It happens primarily at the very end of the great Prayer of Thanksgiving, and also after the Words of Institution, first of the Bread and then of the Wine. When looking at these wonderful and mysterious gifts, the mind and the heart are so full of wonder and mystery that words fail - and the sign of the cross speaks to me of faith and commitment despite all the failings and inadequacies of which I am only too aware. Words that sometimes go with the sign of the cross at these points are "Jesus, my Lord, I thee adore,

Oh, make me love thee more and more."

These words speak both of adoration and wonder, and also of a realisation that I have a long way to go in loving God and my neighbour.

It never ceases to amaze me how many Anglican worshippers firmly

keep their eyes closed, at these points in the Communion Service. The Priest is often left bemused as to why he bothers to hold up the Sacrament to a viewable height. I firmly believe that the majority of worshippers will find it spiritually beneficial to look up and see, and may well find the sign of the cross a helpful devotional aid at these moments.

The same can be said of the service of Benediction, which concludes Evensong the last Sunday of the month in our own Church. The Sacrament (the bread of Holy Communion) is put in a Monstrance, so-called because the Latin verb 'monstrare' means 'to show'. 'to exhibit'. You only show or exhibit something for people to see and have a good look. During this service, again, the sign of the cross may well accompany the looking and seeing.

5. The thought of dedication of what we are about to do, and an act of faith, account for the Preacher using the Invocation and the sign of the cross at the beginning of the sermon.

I do it. I do wonder whether this is superfluous as the whole service has begun with the same words and act, and the sermon is, after all, part of that same service. This applies to the Preacher as much as the rest of the congregation. I wonder if the words and devotion ought to be part of the personal prayer and preparation of the Preacher alone, and not, as it were, made public.

6. Other occasions used by some

(a) At the end of the Apostles' or Nicene Creed

The Creed is an act of Faith and Dedication, and so is the sign of the cross. For some, they belong together. I am not at all sure why the sign of the cross should come at the end, and not at the beginning of the Creed.

(b) Beginning of the 'Magnificat' at Evensong

Mary's song of Faith and Dedication is also a possible time for the personal act of faith and dedication with the use of the sign of the

cross.

(c) Beginning of the Gospel

We all make an act of faith and a commitment by standing to hear the Gospel. It shows we believe it to be important to listen. Many underline this with a personal devotion involving a 'triple' signing with the cross - once on the forehead, once on the lips and once on the torso. The words often used to accompany this devotion are as follows:-

"Lord, bless and hallow all that I think, all that I say, and all that I do."

(d) During Prayer for the Departed

Often the sign of the cross is used to accompany the words, "May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace." To me the use of this sign is again an act of personal faith and commitment in the face of the eternal mystery, which is God, which is life and death, or rather life with God, whether in this world or the next. In praying for the departed I am saying "I believe in the living Lord Jesus, and in the gift of eternal life which he has given to all who turn to him. I want to belong to him." The sign of the cross confirms that thought for me. Let me emphasise again that meaningful prayer for the departed is in no way dependent on the use of the sign of the cross; but for some the use of this personal devotion can be very meaningful and helpful.



Why Do We Use Bells?

There are two kinds of bells, those hanging in the Tower intended to be heard by those outside the church building, and those inside the Church, rung in order to aid the worshippers.

Those inside the Church are known as 'Sanctuary Bells' simply because they are rung by someone in the 'Sanctuary', the area in the immediate proximity of the Altar. These bells were used most when parts of the services were said by the priest in a very low voice. The bells, rung at different points of the service, helped the people know where the priest had got to. Now the bells are used at only three points in the great Prayer of Thanksgiving. They are the points when the priest holds aloft first the bread, then the wine, and on the third occasion both the elements of the Holy Communion. The ringing of the bell means -

"Look up. Behold the Lord who gives himself to you."

As we have said above, it is amazing how many people resolutely refuse to look up at these points in the service. The elements are still held up whether the bells are rung or not.

You will probably have noticed that one of the Tower bells is also chimed at these same points in the service. This is to help the devotions of the housebound and those in hospital. They can be assured that the worship of the Church is going ahead, and those familiar with the Mass can even envisage what is going on at that precise moment.

The chiming of the 'Angelus' on one of the Tower bells immediately before Morning and Evening Prayer most days is also an alert to begin. It serves the further purpose that the parishioners can join in the prayers associated with the ringing of the Angelus. The bell is tolled three times, then twice more of three times, then once of nine times. The prayers and devotions fit as follows:

Three Chimes

The Angel of the Lord brought tidings to Mary and she conceived by the Holy Ghost.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the time of our death.

Three Chimes

Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.

Repeat 'Hail Mary'.

Three Chimes

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.

Repeat 'Hail Mary'.

Nine Chimes

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Pour thy grace, Lord, into our hearts that as we have known the Incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel; so by his Cross and Passion we may be brought to the glory of his resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord.

I have printed out in full the 'Angelus'. There is no reason why parishioners who can hear the bell should not use a devotion of their own choosing. There is much to be said for something considerably shorter than the above. The bell is usually chimed at 10.15 a.m. on Mondays, 9.00 a.m. on Wednesdays, 9.30 a.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and 7.30 a.m. on Sundays. It is tolled in the evening at 5.00 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays and at 7.00 p.m. on Thursdays.

Times of services are always shown on the weekly bulletin available every Sunday.

Ringling Bells

When a bell is chimed it remains upright, and is simply struck by a clapper. When a bell is rung, it is turned upside down. It produces a much louder noise, and, because the bell is on a finger tip balance, can be sounded with much more discipline and control. Bells are rung for three main reasons.

First, they advertise the fact to the neighbourhood that a service will begin in the next half hour.

Secondly, they are rung to the greater glory of God. In the same way that the Church building itself witnesses to the glory of God simply by being there, so the bells witness the same simply by being rung. Sometimes the bells are rung for this reason alone without a service taking place. (The problem is you cannot let the parishioners know what is what on any occasion).

Sometimes the bells are also rung as an offering of prayer and praise on behalf of the ringers. Sometimes a peal of bells will be dedicated as a Thanksgiving for a Golden Wedding, a ninetieth birthday or a Wedding just having taken place at that moment. At other times peals have been rung as an act of prayer for a departed person, for someone who is ill, or for a couple who are about to get married.

Perhaps, I should add a fourth reason for ringing. It is only practise that makes perfect, and regular weekly practise nights have to be endured if generations of new ringers are to be trained.



Why Do Some People Go Down On One Knee As They Enter The Church?

In our church, as in many others, some of the Sacrament is kept from one Sunday to the next, to be distributed among the sick and the housebound. The Sacrament is locked away in a safe place but not a secret place. The place is usually made clear by a white lamp which burns perpetually. In our case, the burning lamp hangs in the centre of the Sanctuary in front of the far Altar (The Sacrament Altar). The Sacrament is locked away in a safe with a silver door on that Altar. In the presence of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, Christians have always felt it right to kneel. It is something to do with the tradition of kneeling in the presence of your king, and what could be more natural than to kneel in the presence of the King of Kings. Before proceeding to their places in church, Christians have bowed the knee as a sign of reverence, adoration and allegiance to their King. So people go down on one or other knee as a personal devotion to the special presence which they recognise in the Church of the Lord's giving to us of himself in Holy Communion. The technical word for this bowing of the knee is "genuflection". When and how you use it is entirely a personal matter, or, indeed, if you use it at all.

If I am asked for advice, I would suggest the following:-

- To use it when first entering the Church.
- To use it when leaving the Church for the last time on a particular occasion. (If you have work in the church which involves going in and out of the church, I would suggest that you do not use it on every occasion. Similarly, if you are doing things in the church which involve you moving around even in close vicinity of the Sacrament Altar, there would appear to be no need to keep repeating the devotion).
- It is used in the course of our services:-
- You will notice when we first come formally into church, the

Choir, Servers and Priests all reverence the Sacrament by genuflecting. For the rest of the service we do not repeat this devotion.

- Before leaving the church at the end of the service, again all present honour the Sacrament by genuflecting, and, usually, also singing a short anthem of praise; "Blessed and praised be Jesus Christ in the most Holy Sacrament. Hosanna in excelsis."

When the service is a Communion Service, you will notice Priest and Servers reverencing the Sacrament of Holy Communion on the Altar, particularly at the end of the great Thanksgiving Prayer and immediately before people receive Communion.

For the congregation, there is the practice, among some, when getting up to go to the Communion rail, to genuflect before approaching the Communion rail. Some find this a useful and meaningful act of devotion. If you find it so, then use it. People also use the devotion immediately after receiving Communion, at the Communion rail. Again, if you find the devotion helpful, please use it.



What is a Water Stoup and Why Do we Use It?

Fonts have usually been placed near the door of the church to emphasise the fact that this is the way we enter upon membership of the church and Christ's family. The custom grew up that every time people entered the church they recalled their Baptism and renewed their commitment to Christ. They did so by dipping their finger into the water of the font and renewing the Baptismal cross on the forehead. When fonts began to be covered for health reasons, apart from when a Baptism was taking place, some of the water was removed and placed in another receptacle (stoup) near the main door of the church. This enabled the personal devotion of those entering the church to continue. Again, for health reasons, salt was often mixed in the water which accounts for the white deposit often seen on "water stoups".

This personal devotion can be meaningful for us, especially if we have the self-discipline always to bring to mind a prayer of commitment to the Lord as we renew our Baptismal cross on our forehead. Like many personal devotions, it can become habitual and almost meaningless. We need to think what we are doing and why we are doing it, and then it can be a valuable aid to us.

Some people repeat this devotion as they leave the church at the end of the service. It has never meant quite so much to me at this point, although, of course, the final prayer of the Mass is a prayer of commitment to the Lord in his service. The devotion certainly fits in with this.

Lord thank you for calling me into your family;
may I follow you more nearly day by day.
Lord you have marked me as your own;
give me the grace more and more to take up the cross and follow you.



The Parish Church
of the
Holy Trinity
Amblecote, Stourbridge, West Midlands