

Why You Might Consider the Rite of Blessing Your Home

Introduction

You might roll your eyes. You might shrug your shoulders. You might scan this article and determine that this is “not for me.” When selecting topics to write about, I always consider my audience. What would be relevant for them? Another question—what is something they may not know about? My topic—the rite of blessing a house—is both relevant and something most have never considered. So, instead of automatically dismissing it, allow me to illumine and persuade. To do so, I will use the language of “might” and “could” rather than “have to” and “should.” Because this rite, like so many ceremonies in the Church, is a “may” with “let us” language. But it also is ancient, that is from the distant past, and involves the space in your life most important—the place where you live, eat, sleep, gather as a family. Your home.

In this article, I will lay out the biblical foundation and history for this rite. But instead of hitting copy and paste on a Wikipedia page, my desire is not simply to inform but persuade you to sanctify the place where you live with the Word of God and prayer. *For that is what a house blessing is and what it does.* It also reminds us that God intends for His Word to live in our home, indeed, in every aspect of our lives. To be inculcated and saturated. And while we can do this sanctifying work simply by living the faith, very often the home becomes an escape to comfort and the Word is left “for church.” So, let us consider what God has to say about His Word in our homes, what Jesus says about His peace given to them, then seek to let that Word and peace pervade every space of our life.

The Old Testament Roots

There are several passages we could draw from, starting with Joshua 24:24:15b: *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* But we focus on one of the most important sections of the Hebrew Scriptures: the Great *Shema*. So important we find Jesus Himself validating and reciting it. Here it is:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you *sit in your house*, and when you *walk by the way*, and *when you lie down*, and *when you rise*. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall *write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 my *emphasis* added)

It’s called the Great Shema because the first word is the Hebrew *sha-mah* (*hear*). Note that this is way more than going to worship. They had lots of stipulations for that! But at the root, the faith was to be taught, learned, lived in every sphere of life. Also note the tactile nature of this command. Bind, write, talk, look at. Orthodox Jews to this day use *mezuzahs*—decorative cases

nailed to their doorposts containing a tiny scroll of—you guessed it—the Shema. God commanded Moses to teach the people to be *completely saturated with His Word and promise wherever they went, starting at home.*

What flows out of the Shema was a reminder and a warning. They were fixin' to inherit the land of promise. That land was full of pagan, demon-worshipping Canaanites. They were to fully ingest God's commands and promises so that they would be equipped and protected...overshadowed with God's Word. They were to *remember* Who their God was, and what He had given them:

“And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.” (Deut 6:10-15)

Everything they were receiving had been prepared by God. All things come from Him. His concern is that they would forget YHWH, Who redeemed them from slavery and brought them out to give them this “land that He swore to your fathers.” The Shema is the chief way God's people were to remember this—by living in remembrance of God's mercy and surrounded by God's Word. The pull of idolatry is strong, and is everywhere. But they were to remember that the Lord is “in your midst.” This brings us to the New Testament.

The New Testament Fulfillment and Reversal of Direction

In Luke 10, Jesus sends out a second wave of workers with a divine commission. The Seventy-two. These are not of the Twelve, but were likewise empowered to go out and “labor for the harvest.” For our topic, take note of what Jesus says to them about houses.

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. *Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’* And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town

and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God *has come near to you.*’ (Luke 10:1-9, again my *emphasis*)

The Great Shema was never overturned by Jesus, but fulfilled. That is, He came and embodied all of the promises of God in Himself and brought the “kingdom near.” What we see here, and throughout Jesus’ journey, is a desire to bring this peaceable kingdom to the people in their very homes, seen in the work of the apostles. They were to enter a house and speak a word of “peace” to it. This is *shalom*, not simply a cessation of hostility, but a *sense of order and completeness*. Peace is a gift solely from God, accomplished by Jesus. His peace is His mercy, the promise of redemption fulfilled. His peace is restoration and relief from our enemies. This is what the Kingdom is and does—a bringing of peace in the active reign and rule of the true King.

Also note the direction of blessing is in a sense reversed. Now, the agents of Jesus are the ones who come to the house and speak a word of peace. They bring God’s Word *into the home*. Instead of this cancelling out the Shema, we might see both Deuteronomy and Luke as a complement and fulfillment in Christ—He is the Word made flesh, Who now tabernacles among His people. Jesus didn’t just teach at a distance. Many of His most important lessons came in the home over table fellowship. We see then a joining of two things: the worship of God and the place where one lives in the person of Christ. Yes, we go to church to hear God’s Word and receive the Eucharist (the peace of Christ). But we also see the direction of that Word *coming into the home*.

An Ancient Practice of Blessing Your Most Important Space with the Word of God

So, God commands that we are to be surrounded by His Word, that we are to embody it in everything we do, and also that God Himself comes to places of abodes and blesses them. We can think of Zaccheus (“I’m coming to your house today!), Mary and Martha, the Magi visiting the Holy Family in their abode...the resurrected Christ entering into the Upper Room and blessing His frightened disciples with “Peace be to you!” All of this orients us toward a practice that developed in the Church, and flourished in the Middle Ages.

The season associated with a “house blessing” was Epiphanytide (the season following Christmas and preceding Lent). The practice of blessing homes arose during this season due to the association with the Magi. Epiphany symbolized that the light of the world had come to those who had sat in darkness. Jesus was born for the world, and the world (the magi) came to pay Him homage. The world coming to Jesus; Jesus coming for the world. So, what did a “house blessing” look like in the Middle Ages?

During the this time, a pastor would visit the home, and use chalk to write above the door, 20+C+M+B+26. These symbols unite multiple meanings. First of all, the “plus” signs are crosses. The numbers represent the calendar year (so 20 and 26 for the year 2026) in which the blessing takes place. The letters C, M, B have two meanings: 1) the initials of the traditional names of the three magi: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar and 2) the abbreviation for the Latin

phrase: *Christus mansionem benedictat*, “may Christ bless the house.” The pastor then would travel throughout the home, applying Holy Water in each room in the name of the Father, Son, ✠ and Holy Spirit, reading scripture, praying prayers, and blessing the activities and persons who would be in each room throughout the year. Each person present was anointed with oil and individually blessed, and typically a candle travels with the party, shining the light of Christ in every corner. This became known as “chalking your house.” The importance in the rite is that the shining light of Christ *comes into every sphere*. While this should be done by those in the home by their daily prayers, catechesis, and holy activity, the clergy represented Christ coming into domestic space to speak a blessing over it. For this is what a called and ordained servant of the Word does—represents Christ in a time and place to a people. The modern rite of a house blessing looks very similar to this, and may retain many of the same features, including the symbolic rituals of chalking above the door and using a candle to illumine the home. The most important element, however, is God’s Word and prayer.

Maybe I haven’t answered your most pressing objection: does this really matter? “This all sounds fine, but why should I do this? What’s the big deal?” Remember that I am framing this not as a should or have-to but a “could” and “may.” To further persuade, I give you four reasons house blessings are salutary:

- 1. They Testify to the Power of Prayer and God’s Word:**

The act of blessing one’s home is, in many ways, an acknowledgment of prayer’s power. The Bible implores believers to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and that the effective prayer of the righteous person has great power (James 5:16), recognizing prayer as a vital means of connecting with God and affecting change in the world. By seeking a blessing for your home, you confess the belief that, through prayer and His Word, we invite God’s presence and grace into the very rooms where we live out our lives.

- 2. They Acknowledge the Reality of Spiritual Opposition:**

Spiritual opposition is an oft-ignored reality in the Christian life. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood *but against the cosmic powers, the spiritual forces in the heavenly places*. Having our homes blessed is an acknowledgment of this reality, a confession of Whose power we are under, and a conscious effort to fortify our living spaces against unseen spiritual adversaries through the invocation of divine protection through the Word of Christ, the Sword of the Spirit.

- 3. They Declare to All Your Household Faith and Allegiance:**

The external act of blessing a home is more than a private affair, but a public declaration of faith in Christ, Who alone may truly bless and grants peace. As those around us witness the act of blessing and the marks upon our doors (if you chalk your house), it becomes a visible proclamation of our fidelity to Christ. It speaks volumes to neighbors and passersby (serving as a

reminder to occupants and guests alike), testifying that this home is a sanctuary where Christ reigns as King.

4. They Provide an Opportunity to Dedicate Your Home, Family, & Life to God:

Just as we dedicate ourselves to a cause or a purpose, blessing your home is a deliberate act of consecration, setting this space apart as one for rest, rejuvenation, healing, hospitality, study, and spiritual growth. We present our abode as a living testament to God's sovereignty, recognizing that our dwellings are spaces where His Kingdom reigns. This dedication extends beyond the physical structure, encompassing the lives and aspirations of those who call it home.

Final Thoughts

This all might seem “too Catholic.” I would encourage you think soberly about our world, our culture, and all the ways vapid and vile influences have crept into our domiciles. Look around your home. If people came over, or shared a meal with you, would they know that you follow Jesus? Would they know you’re a Christian by how your house is decorated? How you live? How your most intimate spaces are adorned? As far as the Catholic thing...the fact is, the Lutheran Reformation was a very conservative one. That means, starting with worship and the Mass, and extending out, “we also keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of readings, vestments, and *other similar things*.” (Apology Article XXIV) A house blessing is one of those “other similar things.” Another way to put it, we kept what was in accord with Scripture, what was useful and beneficial, while getting rid of things that were less clear or even harmful to the faith. While it’s not in the hymnal proper, The Rite of *The Blessing of a Home* is in the *Lutheran Service Book Agenda* (p.313ff). We aren’t being Roman; we’re being Christian in keeping with the salutary ceremonies of the Evangelical Church, or the Body of Christ of all ages.

At the close, I do offer one “pushback.” We don’t do house blessings, or any other ceremony, as if that thing *in and of itself* merits grace. This is not a magic incantation. It’s not a superstitious practice, meaning the doing of the thing is what’s important. The benefit of any ceremony is that it is *received by faith*. Just like a non-believer is not protected merely because they wear a cross around their neck, someone who undergoes this rite isn’t automatically “blessed.” One has to believe in Christ! But I am writing to faithful Christians who are under my care, and I want to encourage you to think deeply about your life of faith and your family. Consider a house blessing this year, or during Epiphany. Ultimately, the rite is about *giving honor to Christ, and directing our hearts, minds, hands, and eyes toward Him*. The *Blessing of a Home* is nothing less than the Word of God and prayer being spoken over a place. The Lutheran rite doesn’t use “holy water” or oil, but simply God’s Word. We may use chalk and a candle. We also sing hymns. So, if you consider doing a house blessing, either now or during Epiphany, do so because you follow Christ and want to give Him all glory, laud, and honor. Flowing from that, we use the rites and ceremonies the Church has established to remember God’s promises given us in Christ, received by faith, and better confess this faith to the world, starting with our families...located in the most important place the world to you—your home.