



Opening Question:

When have you seen someone make a personal statement with a piece of clothing or jewelry? What did you think of the experience?

How do we define ourselves in public? How do we communicate our sense of self? Sometimes we use clothing or jewelry to advertise our self image. Sometimes we express our opinions when we talk to others. Sometimes we participate in activities that tell others about our priorities.

So, how do we tell others about our faith? Through what we have, what we say, and what we do. The Church has a technical name for many of these possessions, sayings, or activities: sacramentals.

Sacramentals

Sacramentals are not sacraments. Sacraments are universal signs of worship. Sacramentals are outside of formal worship but can point us towards that worship. They can be local to a particular culture, to a certain time and place. They can be even personal. For example, they can be medals or crosses we wear, prayers we say, even activities we do together like saying a group rosary. First among sacramentals are blessings calling God's favor upon people, places or things. Sometimes, blessings are prayers for commitment, sometimes for protection.

No matter whether the sacramentals are what we have, or say, or do, they are meant to prepare us for worship. They are a means to help us focus on God.

Personal Piety

How people use sacramentals sometimes expresses a particular devotion, what we call popular piety. Popular piety can consist of prayers or other activities that draw the faithful together. Popular piety can include saying a daily prayers or Scripture study. It can be seasonal, like lighting an Advent wreath or attending Stations of the Cross during



Lent. It can involve travel on a pilgrimage or for a procession. No matter what popular piety people engage in, it should harmonize with, but not replace, liturgy.

The Rosary

One of the most well know form of popular piety is the rosary. The term rosary describes a loop of beads with a short tail. It also refers to the devotion when one marks individual prayers said on the beads. The short tail has a crucifix on its end. Here, one begins the rosary by making the Sign of the Cross and saying the Apostles Creed. Then there are five beads, the first for saying an Our Father, the next three for Hail Marys and then a space for saying the Glory Be. The loop itself consists of fifty five beads divided into five sets of eleven beads each. These are called decades. Each decade begins with an Our Father, followed by ten Hail Marys and finished with a Glory Be.

Traditionally, the rosary consisted of 150 Hail Marys that were divided into three groupings of decades: the Joyful Mysteries about the birth and early life of Jesus, the Sorrowful Mysteries about his Passion and Death, and the Glorious Mysteries about his Resurrection and Glory.

The origin of the rosary and its 150 Hail Marys is uncertain. Some speculate it came from the ancient Jewish practice of reciting all 150 psalms daily.

In 2002, Pope John Paul II added a new set called the Mysteries of Light about the public ministry of Jesus.

The Rosary is based upon the repetition of prayers. Saying the same prayers over and over has the advantage of calming the scattered nature of our internal dialogues. So they help us to relax and focus on the presence of God.

We are Christians. As such, we demonstrate our faith by what we have, what we say, and what we do. These personal items and actions sometimes involve sacramentals like rosary beads and prayers. They are a means to open us to the presence and possibility of God in our lives. They help us focus on the divine and help us prepare for an encounter with God in worship.

Closing Question:

What is your favorite form of personal piety?

Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs CCC 1667-1673.

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