HOLY MOTHER CHURCH has, moreover, instituted sacramentals. These are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church. By them men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy.

**Various forms of sacramentals**

Among sacramentals **blessings** (of persons, meals, objects, and places) come first. Every blessing praises God and prays for his gifts. In Christ, Christians are blessed by God the Father "with every spiritual blessing." This is why the Church imparts blessings by invoking the name of Jesus, usually while making the holy sign of the cross of Christ.
The characteristics of sacramentals

Sacramentals are instituted for the sanctification of certain ministries of the Church, certain states of life, a great variety of circumstances in Christian life, and the use of many things helpful to man. In accordance with bishops' pastoral decisions, they can also respond to the needs, culture, and special history of the Christian people of a particular region or time. They always include a prayer, often accompanied by a specific sign, such as the laying on of hands, the sign of the cross, or the sprinkling of holy water (which recalls Baptism).

Sacramentals derive from the baptismal priesthood: every baptized person is called to be a "blessing," and to bless. Hence lay people may preside at certain blessings; the more a blessing concerns ecclesial and sacramental life, the more is its administration reserved to the ordained ministry (bishops, priests, or deacons).

Sacramentals do not confer the grace of the Holy Spirit in the way that the sacraments do, but by the Church's prayer, they prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it. "For well-disposed members of the faithful, the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event of their lives with the divine grace which flows from the Paschal mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. From this source all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. There is scarcely any proper use of material things which cannot be thus directed toward the sanctification of men and the praise of God."
IN BRIEF

1677 Sacramentals are sacred signs instituted by the Church. They prepare men to receive the fruit of the sacraments and sanctify different circumstances of life.

1678 Among the sacramentals blessings occupy an important place. They include both praise of God for his works and gifts, and the Church's intercession for men that they may be able to use God's gifts according to the spirit of the Gospel.

1679 In addition to the liturgy, Christian life is nourished by various forms of popular piety, rooted in the different cultures. While carefully clarifying them in the light of faith, the Church fosters the forms of popular piety that express an evangelical instinct and a human wisdom and that enrich Christian life.

Our crucifix, icons and other articles are examples of what we call sacramentals. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, sacramentals are sacred signs instituted by the Church to prepare us to receive the fruit of the sacraments and to sanctify different circumstances of our lives (no. 1677).

Practically speaking, the myriad of little things that are sacramentals are the parts of catholicity that jostle against us in our everyday life, those little extras that often tell others we are Catholic. They are the images, actions and blessings that are unique to our faith; those sometimes humble reminders of what the Catholic faith is all about, like the crucifix on our wall.

Sacramentals run the gamut from holy water to articles such as relics and rosaries. Some, such as holy water, are used by almost every Catholic. Others are more personal, such as devotionals to a particular saint.

Sacramentals have embellished the official liturgies of the Church or sprung from the cultures of different peoples and different times.
For being Catholic is more than the minimal obligations. It is even more than practicing virtues and avoiding sin. It is a way of life in which the body, its senses and spirit are intermingled.

Sacramentals, by their very nature, their apparent status as extras, can supply the externals that make the Catholic way of life singular and outstanding.

Sacramentals are not superstitions. There is a part of us that longs for something tangible we can hold on to, something to look at, something to touch, something that interacts with the senses. The sacraments, those sacred mixtures of matter and the Holy Spirit, fulfill that need. And so, in a lesser way, do sacramentals.

What is the difference between correct use of the sacramental and superstition? It has to do with an inner attitude, for superstition is second cousin to magic. The superstitious person says, "If I sprinkle holy water here, say these prayers and cross myself, I will make God or His saints do this for me." But the person using a sacramental properly says, "I want to be closer to God—to be constantly and effectively reminded of the power of His love and glory, of His protection, forgiveness and mercy. So I will cross myself when I pass a church to remind myself of His passion. I will make a novena to ask God's saints for their prayers. I will do these things, not because I am strong and have the power to make God and His saints do my will, but because I am weak, distractable and forgetful, and need to remind myself of True Reality."

Some Catholics hang crucifixes and holy images in their homes to remind them of God and His works. They cross themselves, bless themselves and their homes with holy water and oil. They pray the Angelus at noon in remembrance of the Incarnation. They kiss the Bible or holy object they have accidentally dropped.

Catholics who choose to weave the use of sacramentals into their daily lives can experience a richer, more textured Catholicism.
Examples of Sacramentals:

- Adoration/ Benediction
- Advent Calendar
- Ashes/ Palms
- Candles
- Fasting
- Genuflection
- Holy Water
- Medals/Scapulars
- Novenas
- Pilgrimages
- Rosary
- Scapulars
- Shrines
- Stations of the Cross
- Statues/ Devotions to Saints