

The Aspergillum



An aspergillum (or less commonly, aspergillum or aspergil) is a liturgical implement used to sprinkle holy water. It comes in two common forms: a brush that is dipped in the water and shaken, and a perforated ball at the end of a short handle. Some have sponges or internal reservoirs that dispense holy water when shaken, while others must periodically be dipped in an aspersorium (also known as a situla or holy water bucket/pail).

The Blessing of Ashes on Ash Wednesday



An aspergillum may be used at any Sunday Mass as a reminder of Baptism in replacement of the Penitential Act, typically during the Easter season.

The aspergillum is used as a reminder of Baptism at the Easter Vigil when the priest walks down the aisle sprinkling everyone with water. At a funeral, the priest will sprinkle holy water on the casket.

In other occasions, the priest uses it during a blessing, such as for the candles during Candlemas, the ashes for Ash Wednesday, and the palms during Palm Sunday Mass. The aspergillum can be used in other manners where sprinkling of holy water is appropriate, as in a house blessing, in which the priest might bless the entry to the home.

The name derives from the Latin verb *aspergere* 'to sprinkle'. From the Catholic Aspergillum we get Asperges which is the name given to the rite of sprinkling a congregation with holy water.

The name comes from the first word in the 9th verse of Psalm 51: *Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

Fun fact:

Aspergillus, a genus of mold, was named in 1729 by the Italian priest and biologist Pietro Antonio Micheli: An *Aspergillus* mold spore under a microscope resembles the aspergillum device priests use — described as a circle or globe, called the vesicle, that is attached to a handle with spikes around the outside.

