

One highlight of a pilgrimage to Walsingham is to receive the blessing of water from the well. This simple ceremony in which we are offered a sip of water, are marked on our foreheads with the sign of the cross and water is poured over our hands.

This ceremony is what is called a “sacramental”, that is to say that although it is not a sacrament, it is nevertheless a sign of “God’s favour and goodness towards us”; it reminds us of the great unrepeatable sacrament of baptism in which through water God conferred on us all the blessings of his love. It also echoes God’s other gifts which flow from baptism, forgiveness of our sins and the promise of healing from whatever threatens us.

When we approach the well, it is therefore worth remembering the blessing of the water at the Easter Vigil:

*Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ
was baptized in the river Jordan,
we thank you for the gift of water
to cleanse us and revive us.
We thank you that through the waters of the Red Sea
you led your people out of slavery
to freedom in the Promised Land.
We thank you that through the deep waters of death
you brought your Son,
and raised him to life in triumph.
Bless this water, that your servants who are washed in it
may be made one with Christ in his death and in his resurrection,
to be cleansed and delivered from all sin.
Send your Holy Spirit upon them,
bring them to new birth in the household of faith
and raise them with Christ to full and eternal life;
for all might, majesty, authority and power are yours,
now and for ever.*

The “sprinkling” is not therefore superstitious trust in some supposedly magical property of water but a profound and lasting confidence in God whose greatest desire for each of us is that we should be whole in body, soul and spirit

Being “sprinkled” is a way of saying again the wonderful words of the baptismal liturgy:
“I believe and trust in him”.