

What Did We Do and Why?

The Fish Bone Blessing

I diverge from our reflections on the Rosary to revisit last weekend's *Blessing of the Throats* on the Feast of St. Blaise (also Blase). Blaise was martyred in ancient Armenia, present day Turkey, in the early 4th Century. After first working as a physician of the body he later became a physician and healer of the soul as a bishop, and people sought him out for the cure of both bodily and spiritual ills. Tradition has it that as he was being taken to prison before his martyrdom a mother set her only son, choking on a fish-bone, at his feet. Bishop Blaise prayed for the boy who was cured straight away. Accordingly, Saint Blaise has been invoked for protection against injuries and illnesses of the throat, and our blessing of throats after masses last week is in that tradition as one of the *sacramentals* of the Church. In addition to the seven Sacraments we celebrate as Catholics, One of the things that particularly characterizes our Catholic Church is what is called the *sacramental principle* that sees all created things to be good and expressive of God's presence and grace. This sacramental principle is distinctly Catholic, and is the basis for all we do as Catholics when we use material things to know and name spiritual realities. As St. Ignatius Loyola writes in his *Spiritual Exercises*: *All created things are gifts of God, given to us to be the means by which we can come to know, love, and serve God better.* In the Blessing of Throats on the Feast of St. Blaise, blessed candles, the prayer of St. Blaise, and the fellowship of Blaise himself are the created gifts that remind of God's healing will and power, for everything about us, but with specific reference to our throats. There is nothing magical or superstitious in this practice, but simply yet another way we express our openness to the care of our God who knows our every need, yet also asks us to ask for what we need as an expression of our faith, our hope, and our love.