

Holy water glasses for holy people

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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At its worst, Protestantism has long been deeply suspicious of all holy things, of the very notion that a physical object can carry anything of the sacred. At its best, such a suspicion is aimed instead at the notion of holier things—of an elite, rarefied sacrality that sets a few things utterly apart.

So I'm not among those rolling my eyes at Rep. Bob Brady [for seeing something holy in a glass of water](#). Where I part ways with Brady is over the fact that it had to be *the pope's* water glass—the suggestion that everything Pope Francis touches is singularly blessed. (To be clear, Brady represents one Catholic view here but hardly the only one.)

Clint Schneklath [posted a helpful comment about this](#):

As a Lutheran, I happen to believe the vocation of all the baptized is as holy as any other. Luther liked to say that a father changing a diaper is more holy than any monk's prayers in a monastery.... This is why, while Bob Brady may drink the pope's water, I eat the scraps from my kids' plates. Because I receive a blessing. And I hate to waste food.

I do this, too. For Clint's second reason; I hadn't quite articulated his first. But I like it. It fits into a broader idea, characteristically though not exclusively Lutheran, [that I have spent some time with](#): that the created order's sacredness is not rarefied but abundant, a holy ordinary. There may be nothing particularly special about a water glass the pope happened to use. Yet water is holy, as are the natural resources from which people make glassware. They are created by God; they give us life.

The obvious objection here is to appeal to the "everyone's a winner" fallacy. [To paraphrase Dash Incredible](#): saying everything is holy is another way of saying nothing is. A relic's power *depends* on its rarity; it is what it is by not being what all the other things are. You can say your kitchen cupboards are full of relics, but what difference would that make?

It's a fair point, but one with its own assumptions. For starters, it assumes that what we humans need from religion is a classification system, a way of defining things in reference to one another. I'm convinced that when it comes to recognizing the holy, what we need most is a lens for seeing the world.