

# Blessings

A blessing is related to the word 'benediction'. Benedictions, from the Latin *Benedire* (Et. 'to speak well of'), are performed over men and women to entrust them to God. This signifies that blessings are made with words, but more importantly, with the heart. When blessing someone, you are looking out for others, by asking God to provide them with all possible good for their welfare. You are free to bless others as much as you can, using brief sentences such as "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Blessing means praise, the desire that good fortune go with a person or thing, dedication of a person or thing to God's service and a gift. In liturgical language a blessing is a ritual ceremony by which an authorized cleric in major orders sanctifies persons or things to divine service, or invokes divine favor on what he blesses. The Church's ritual provides for over two hundred such blessings, some of which are reserved to bishops or members of certain religious institutes.

Blessings come under the category of sacramentals. A sacramental is a special prayer, action or object which, through the prayers of the Church, prepares a person to receive grace and to better cooperate with it. One example is when we make the Sign of the Cross using holy water when entering a church. That pious action and the holy water itself, which together remind us of our baptism, awaken us to the presence of God and dispose us to receiving God's grace. Unlike a sacrament, a sacramental does not itself confer the grace of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, like a sacrament, a sacramental helps the faithful to sanctify each moment of life and to live in the paschal mystery of our Lord.

- By celebrating a blessing, the faithful can also sanctify various situations and events in their lives.
- Blessings are signs to the faithful of the spiritual benefits achieved through the Church's intercession.

Throughout sacred Scripture, we find how God issued various blessings. In the account of creation, God blessed all the living creatures and especially Adam and Eve, telling them to be fertile, to multiply and to fill the earth and subdue it (Gn 1:22, 28). After the flood, God blessed Noah and his sons (Gn 9:1ff).

The Patriarchs administered blessings, particularly to the eldest son, signifying a bestowing of God's benevolence, peace and protection. In a similar vein, the Lord spoke to Moses and commanded the following blessing for all the Israelites: "The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord Look upon you kindly and give you peace!" (Nm 6:22-27).

The people also blessed God, praising His goodness shown through creation as illustrated in the beautiful hymn of praise in the Book of Daniel (3:52-90). The Preface for Eucharistic Prayer IV captures well this understanding of a blessing: "Father in Heaven...source of life and goodness, you have created all things, to fill your creatures with every blessing and lead all men to the joyful vision of your light."

For us Christians, blessings have taken on an even greater meaning through Christ who perfectly revealed to us the goodness and love of God. St. Paul wrote, "Praised be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing."

Jesus blessed those He encountered: the little children (Mk 10:13-16) and the Apostles at the ascension (Lk 24:50-53). He blessed objects :the loaves used to feed the 5,000 (Mk 6:34ff) and the bread of the Last Supper (Mt 26:26-30). Since Christ entrusted His saving ministry to the Church, it has instituted various blessings for people as well as objects to prompt the faithful to implore God's protection, divine assistance, mercy, faithfulness and favor.

## Who can do a blessing?

CCC 1669: "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 its administration is reserved to the ordained ministry (bishops, priest, deacons)"

Priests are the ordinary ministers of blessings, asking God's help for those people being blessed or dedicating something to a sacred service; the priest's blessing is imparted with the weight of the Church and therefore has great value in the eyes of God. The blessing of a layperson upon another, such as a parent blessing a child, is an act of good will whereby the person implores God's aid for the person; the value of this blessing in the eyes of God depends upon the person's individual sincerity and sanctity.

Blessings are categorized into two types: invocative and constitutive. In an invocative blessing, the minister implores the divine favor of God to grant some spiritual or temporal good without any change of condition, such as when a parent blessed a child. This blessing is also a recognition of God's goodness in bestowing this "blessing" upon us, such as when we offer a blessing for our food at meal time. In blessing objects or places, a view is also taken toward those who will use the objects or visit the places.

A constitutive blessing, invoked by a bishop, priest or deacon, signifies the permanent sanctification and dedication of a person or thing for some sacred purpose. Here the person or object takes on a sacred character and would not be returned to non-sacred or profane use. For example, when religious Sisters or Brothers profess final vows, they are blessed, indicating a permanent change in their lives. Or, when a chalice is blessed, it becomes a sacred vessel dedicated solely to sacred usage.

In all, in bestowing His own blessing, God declares His goodness. We in turn bless God by praising Him, thanking Him for all of His benefits and offering to Him our service, adoration and worship. When we invoke God's blessing, we implore His divine benevolence, trusting that He will respond to our needs.

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