

Workshop Session



The Liturgical Books Series

THE BOOK OF BLESSINGS

Introduction

History and Theology of Blessing

- Deeply spiritual meaning from our Jewish ancestors (18 benedictions)
- Blessing-tradition: scriptural basis
- God is the source of all goodness—Israel recognized this
- Jesus is the epiphany of God’s blessing: every blessing praises God and thanks him for His gifts
- Blessings are symbols to recognize God’s creative power—the Spirit of the living God—in symbols
- Blessings imitate the sacraments (but are not sacraments)

The *Book of Blessings*: A Description

- From Rome *De Benedictionibus*, prepared by ICEL and approved
- Additionally, 42 orders and prayers were added, prepared by U.S. NCCB (so if you return to the Latin, the numbering in English differs from the Latin because of the additions)
- 1989 edition (blue ritual book), hardcover brown ritual book, and small abridged edition 1990
- Abridged edition omits those blessings that can be done “within Mass.”
- In Spanish, *Bendicional* approved for Mexico but often used in U.S. (different format but same basic blessings: *Bendicional* (published 2000, republished 2020). Index in back of book

Sacramentals and Sacramental Actions

(CCC n. 1668, 1669)

- Blessings are *sacramentals*. Blessings imitate *sacraments* in that they call us to give praise and thanks to God.
- CCC: “Sacramentals are instituted for the sanctification of certain ministries of the Church, certain states of life, a great variety of many things helpful to man...they always include a prayer, often accompanied by a specific sign, such as the laying on of hands, the sign of the cross, or the sprinkling of holy water (which recalls Baptism). Every baptized person is called to be a “blessing” and to bless. (see Luke 6:27-28)
- **sacramental** an action (example: sign of the cross, sprinkling with holy water) or an object (ex. a blessed palm branch) or prayer (ex. a blessing) that indicates/reminds us that God is found in other places besides “within a church building” (such as the Eucharist reposed in the tabernacle). In the Western church, a sacramental is a “sacred sign by which spiritual effects are signified and are obtained by the intercession of the Church.”ⁱ Simply put, a sacramental provides the occasion for a personal “gracing encounter” with Christ. (Presenter definition)
- **sacrament** Note initially that all basic experiences of Christians in the entirety of their lives comprise the fabric of their lives (birth, becoming an adult, sickness, suffering love, friendship, sin and reconciliation, choosing a vocation, death). The entire experience of ritual moments that *transform the meaning of a Christian’s life* is the effect of a sacrament. The meaning comes from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the ritual formally states this meaning and relates human life to the significance of Jesus’ saving action. The sacraments give the grace that they signify, *ex opera operato* (if administered properly with no obstacles, regardless of the holiness of the minister). Based on the wisdom that expanded sacramental theology (raising the issues of Christian life and Christian experience) via the Second Vatican Council, a sacrament is abundantly more than simply “an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.”ⁱⁱ (presenter definition)

Blessing in the Life of the Church

(CCC n. 1671)

- “Among sacramentals, *blessings* (of persons, meals, objects, and places) come first. Every blessing praises God and prays for his gifts...the Church

imparts blessings by invoking the name of Jesus, usually while making the holy sign of the cross of Christ.” (from CCC, above)

- As the Second Vatican Council re-imagined the theology of belonging to the family of God, as a direct result and duty of our Baptism, the Council reminded the People of God that Jesus gives substance to God’s blessing with the reminder of his own life.
- We are a people of signs, and the sacraments speak to us of decisive periods in our lives when we encounter the living God. BLESSINGS are *symbols* that the living God is with us in the activity of daily living. Blessings extend and give expression to a life of faith.
- As we review the abundance and the basic structure of the Book of Blessings, we also take time to notice that *every Chapter contains a praenotanda that should be reviewed, to supplement and increase our basic understanding of the sacramental that we are praying for/with.*

Content of the Book of Blessings

See handout Overview BLESSINGS

- Familiarity with the *content*—a rich resource
- *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* (revised ed.—why?) Familiarity with the *content*

Basic Structure of a Blessing

Introductory Rite

*Proclamation of the Word of God**

*Prayer of Blessing**

Conclusion (final blessing, song, sending)

Details of Basic Structure

Note: * indicates II and III may not be omitted in the celebration of a blessing

- I** **Introductory Rite**
Sign of Cross, Greeting, Address
- II** **Proclamation of the Word of God***
Reading (scripture suggestions in BB)
[Psalm, song, or silence]
[another Reading possible]
[homily or reflection]

- III **Prayer of Blessing***
 - Intercessions or a Litany
 - [Lord's Prayer]
 - Blessing formula
- IV **Conclusion**
 - [Final blessing, song, sending oration]

Instructions for the Minister- Offices and Ministries

Gestures and Signs

Vesture

Ritual Book/script

Proper Minister of the Rite:

BISHOP may do all blessings

*Priest (Note **sometimes Pastor only**)*

Deacon

OR Deacon if priest or bishop not present

Layperson

OR Layperson if bishop, priest or deacon not present

Guide to Preparing Blessings for God's People

Celebration of a Blessing: An Example

Review of the Blessing-Literature *See handout Bibliography*

Reminders

- The timing of this session is intentional, *planned before Ash Wednesday 2021*. Lent is an opportune season to begin integrate Blessings into the life of the parish and make them available to the domestic church.
- Careful attention needs to be paid to the **rubric** that names the presiding minister (priest/deacon/lay person)

- The assembly (person, congregation) has a role: participation indicates and implies PRESENCE. Blessings always happen with some participation of the faithful.
- Catechize the assembly that Blessings are not solely the domain of the clergy. There are abundant opportunities for blessings to be accomplished in the domestic church by lay men and women.
- Blessings may be shared with interfaith groups, at ecumenical gatherings, with Christians and non-Christians, at public civil gatherings (Blessing of a New Library or Hospital), and at Athletic Events.
- Catechesis is required for the parish—online, social media, liturgical homily, bulletin

Conclusion

i Canon law (CIC) 1166

ii Adapted in part from the Baltimore Catechism (rev. edition, 1941)