

Living the Spirit Blessing

Several weeks ago I wrote an insert about adoration. In it I recalled how in the Gloria we pray the words: “We adore you.” It has since come to my mind that we also say “We bless you.” The words are addressed to God our Father. Just what does it mean to bless God? I did some research to sharpen my memory of the theology involved in the answer. I looked to my usual Scriptural source, the *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.

[Before going any further, let me mention this book. For me it is a special and valued book. It was given to me by Father John Simons when I was made a monsignor. He was my sponsor at my Ordination, at teacher I almost idolized from high school, and obviously a dear friend and spiritual guide. I know he would be pleased that I make use of his gift to continue to learn, and write these inserts. What English teacher wouldn't be pleased?]

The answer to why we can say to God, “We bless you” is given in an interpretation in this book. “By a strange paradox, it often happens that the weak bless the powerful, that man dares to bless God. This is because if the poor man has nothing to give to the rich man and man has nothing to give to God a blessing establishes between beings a vital and reciprocal relation which enables the lesser one to see the generosity of the powerful one pour out upon him. It is not absurd to bless God who is ‘above all blessings.’ It is simply to confess this generosity and to render thanks to Him. This is the creature’s first duty (Romans 1, 21).”

Blessing can be studied simply as a word and its meanings can be helpful in any study of Scripture and our religious customs of prayer and spirituality. Often we speak or hear the forms and formulae of these religious practices in a thoughtless way. How often we say “God bless you” when a person sneezes. How often we begin our meals with a blessing, asking, “Bless us, O Lord...” I have even been fascinated that in the TV program “Blue Bloods” the family is often presented at the table saying just that prayer. Of course, this use is not to be seen as anything but worthy, even if it is not well prayed. I hope we do not fail to greet others on occasion with the phrase “God bless you” and really mean it. In times of sorrow or pain it is a very consoling way to express our compassion.

Blessing is a gift which touches life and its mystery. This gift is expressed by the word and by its mystery – its deep meaning. One understands something of its meaning from the word spoken in Greek and Latin. Both *eulogia* and *benedictio* mean to speak the good. One understands the “good” as the way God described his creation in the account in Genesis. Our reaction to the mystery of blessing encompasses prayer, thanksgiving and generosity. God is generous beyond description; man is thankful in prayer for God’s generosity.

The study of the word “blessing” as used in the Bible is important, because it has so many meanings in different texts. Scholars look to its grammatical usage, as a noun, a verb or an adjective. To bless is to make life gush forth. A blessing may describe a

miracle, God's intervention. "Blessed" can describe a person, an event, an action and we can come by study to know the meaning of what we read. The Lord's miracles are seen as a blessing, a gift beyond the natural. We hear at Mass the description of what Jesus did at the Last Supper: He took bread and said the blessing...; the chalice and blessed it saying... and so bread and wine are changed into His Body and Blood. We have prayed "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." [As an aside, this is the only blessing in the Gospels addressed to Jesus.] The Bible speaks to us of blessings as a giving of life or its enhancement. A blessing often calls forth thankfulness, and the entire Mass is called a Eucharist, a word meaning thanksgiving.

Can I derive something for our living the Spirit from this? I think of God's generosity to us as He blesses us at every Mass; I see our desire to worship in adoration with a thanksgiving that is truly our blessing to God. At Mass we bless Him, and admit our poverty to do anything else. And God responds to us with grace upon grace, even when we are hardly aware of His magnificent goodness, which is given us.

We have heard of or even experienced blessings that God has bestowed on others. If you have watched the journey home on EWTN you have heard of how the Lord has blessed many with the gift of faith or renewed that faith. We can relate how something or someone in our life has been a blessing for us, and mean something more than ordinary. We find around us so much generosity to be a blessing enhancing life in so many ways. Think of how St. Mother Teresa was a blessing who gave generously of her life, and think of other saints. Wasn't St. Pope John Paul a blessing to the Church? Did not God have something to do with that?

Use your imagination and memory and I do not doubt you will find the blessings in your life and know how they enhanced its very meaning. Like all things blessings ultimately come down to love, even when we least expect them to do so. Moreover, we must try to be a blessing a others, as well as to give blessings to them. Love will find the way.

Let me finally share with you what is meant by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, as Biblical Theology writes of it. "If the Eucharist contains the whole blessing of God in Christ, if His last act is the blessing He leaves to the Church and the blessing He stirs up in her, nevertheless, the New Testament nowhere says that Jesus Christ is the blessing of the Father. Actually, blessing is always a gift, a life received and assimilated. Now the gift beyond all others is the Holy Spirit. Not that Jesus Christ is less than the Holy Spirit but the Spirit is given in order to be in us the gift received from God."

Think of how many times the Bible speaks of how the Holy Spirit is given to us. It is the Spirit of God that is active in our life, our life of the spirit, our spiritual journey from God to God. Indeed, we are the temples of the Holy Spirit through the baptism conferred on us. The divine gift is the gift of God himself. "It exhibits all the traits of blessing – water which regenerates, birth and renewal, life and fecundity, plenitude and peace, joy and communion of hearts – all fruits of the Holy Spirit."

God bless you and love you always!
Monsignor David Morrison