BLESSED BE GOD AND HIS CREATION
National Bulletin on Liturgy
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This Bulletin is primarily pastoral in scope, and is prepared for members of parish liturgy committees, readers, musicians, singers, teachers, religious and clergy, and all who are involved in preparing and celebrating the community liturgy.

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BLESSED BE GOD AND HIS CREATION

Blessings are a part of our rich heritage as Christians. Our religious tradition sees the act of blessing in a threefold manner:

• **Blessing God:** We praise and thank God for himself, and glorify him for the goodness he continues to show his people.

• **Blessing people:** We praise God, and ask his benefits for various persons. In particular, we pray that they may grow in his love and service.

• **Blessing places and things:** We praise God, and ask him to help us use these things in his service.

A fresh look at blessings today and ideas for celebrating them will help us to move toward a better and more frequent use of blessings in our community worship and patterns of life.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A rich Christian experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place in our lives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blessed are you, Lord God</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian development of blessings</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who gives a blessing?</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing a blessing</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Bless God</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the <em>berakah</em></td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model blessings</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blessing People</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model blessings</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sick adult</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental blessing for children</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sick child</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family gathering</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before and after childbirth</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly person</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travellers</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throats</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blessing Places</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model blessings</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place or area</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blessing Things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model blessings</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crops</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing boats</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banner</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any object</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles of devotion</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful reading</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half century of union</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EDITORIAL

A RICH CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

Our attitudes and approaches to the world, to people and to life are naturally reflected in the way we pray and celebrate. Ritual reflects life — and at the same time as our ritual actions show forth our thoughts, we are being influenced by the gospel and by the Church’s attitude of faith. Our ritual acts teach us as well as signifying who we are.

In what ways do we take note of what God means to us? What are our attitudes toward his creation? toward other nations and races and religions? toward those who think or speak or believe differently from us? What way do we look at older persons, at youth, at those whose hairstyles or fashions differ from ours? Do we express these attitudes and opinions in our communities and liturgical celebrations?

In presenting this number of the Bulletin, we encourage the Church in our country to take a fresh look at our attitudes toward God and his gifts to us, and toward other people.

By taking a fresh look at the idea of blessing as a continuation of the eucharistic action of God’s people, we will come to a fuller understanding of his goodness, and respond to it by our liturgy and our way of life.

The Catholic Church has a rich tradition of blessing God and of blessing the people and things he has created. The models and ideas offered in this issue can be of value in helping your believing community to see blessings as a rich Christian experience. By sharing in developing and celebrating blessings, your parish, community or family can join the angels and saints and the ordinary people who down through time have cried out:

_Blessed be God and his creation!_

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WE BLESS YOU, FATHER

For all that we receive, we bless the maker of all things through his Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

A PLACE IN OUR LIVES

Too often in the past we have been inclined to see blessings completely out of context, as though they were healthful lightning bolts from heaven. The “inter-testamental period” we have been in during the past decade has given us time to readjust our thinking, and to see this part of the liturgy in the context of renewal.

God’s continuing dialogue with mankind is a blessing. In Christ we are always before his throne of grace. His Spirit is ever present in our lives, putting into words the inexpressible thoughts of man. God’s word in scripture continues to be a lamp to guide our feet, a light for our paths. In these and many other ways, God continues to bless us, to give himself to mankind.

In this context, in response to God’s gifts to us, man blesses God by returning praise and thanksgiving to him. As the high priest of creation, mankind carries on this great work, this liturgy. And because Christ is our high priest and mediator, it is through his offering that ours is made: through him and with him and in him.

Various individual blessings of persons, places or things should be seen within this context, a twofold context of God’s blessing us and our blessing him. This current of blessing runs through the life of the Church, and cannot be isolated from it. Individual acts of blessing partake of both elements — God blesses us, we bless God — and share in the Church’s liturgical action. Blessings are not isolated bolts of beneficent grace from heaven, but part of God’s continuing care and part of the Church’s continuing response of praise.

What Is a Blessing?

We use the word blessing in two ways. In both senses, it means giving praise to God.

- We bless or praise God for his greatness and for his gifts to us; our action is one of praise and thanksgiving.
- We ask God to bless us and what we possess or use, so that we may continue in his service; our action is one of petition.

When we ask God to bless a person, we are asking our Father to show even greater signs of his love for this person. Thus, we ask him to help a sick person to accept his suffering as part of his way of following Christ, and at the same time we pray for the person’s return to health, if this is God’s will.

We bless bread and wine — or any food — when we thank God over them for his mighty acts: for creating and redeeming the world through his Son.

When we say that we are blessing things — or perhaps, that we are asking God to bless them — we mean that we are praising and thanking him for his gifts to us; we are asking him to help us use these things in his service. To bless this cup of wine or coffee, for instance, means we are praising God for it and all his gifts, and that we are ready to use them well: thus, food is to be shared with the hungry; automobiles are to be driven for service or hospitality, or in appreciation of and respect for the beauty and vastness of God’s creation.
When we bless things which are used in the service of the altar or of a Christian person, we are showing our intention to dedicate these things and use them in accord with God’s will, for the advance of his kingdom. By our blessing, we give them over to his purposes. In blessing schools, houses and churches, we remember that it is the people who use them who make them have their meaning, and who use them for the kingdom.

A blessing is a social commitment. Not only do we pray that God’s kingdom will come: we also work to make it come. This we do by seeking to let God’s will be done everywhere, but first of all by us, in our own lives. As a prayer of praise, a blessing has to be based on our sincere and humble acceptance of God as our Father, and of our position as his children — sinful, redeemed in love, called to be holy. A blessing cannot be an automatic dedication of an object to God’s work: we have to cooperate with the Lord’s will in the way we use this object. We cannot expect a blessing for other people to have any meaning unless we and they are ready to work for the kingdom. Blessings — rightly and fully understood — are a more complete dedication of our lives and possessions to the glory of God and the service of his people in love.

A spiritual event: In calling on God’s power, we are aware of our weakness, for it is in our weakness that he is able to do great things in us. We admit our powerlessness before him, and ask him to raise us up in his service. Blessings can be a strong reminder to us of our creaturehood.

As the beloved people of God, we come to our Father for his help. We come to him through Christ his Son, for he has chosen us from all eternity in Christ, who is now our mediator. Sealed with the Spirit of promise, we pray — and the Spirit, who is able to express what we cannot even put into words, pleads with God for us. (In the tradition of the Christian liturgy, most prayers in this issue of the Bulletin are addressed to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.)

One of the values of using scripture in our blessings is the gradual awareness it brings to us of our continuity with the blessed people of the blessed God. Abraham received blessings because of his faith — and we, his spiritual children, receive blessings because of our faith. God was faithful to his people in the desert, even when they were unfaithful to him — and he remains faithful to his Church today, even though we are not always true to him.

God’s word goes forth, and returns to him, bearing fruit. Our lives — guided, improved, sanctified by God’s saving word — bear fruit, the kind that lasts (Jn. 15:16). As we live our life, we praise God by our words, our actions, our worship: in the eucharist, the Lord Jesus takes our praise and offers it with his — and as his — to the Father. In the eucharistic prayer, we take the word we have received in praise, and give it back to the Father in thanksgiving.

Every blessing is a revelation of God who blesses us: a sign of his mercy, his love, his concern for his children. A blessing is a prayer of faith, an expression of hope, an unveiling of love. Every prayer of blessing helps to deepen these virtues in us, to lead us further on the ways of the Lord.

Blessed be the Lord who saves us!
Blessed are the people he saves!
Eucharist at the Center

The eucharist is the source and center of the sacraments, which cannot be viewed in isolation. The action of God's gift to man and our response in Christ is seen in each of the sacraments.

Sacramentals: The simplest way to view the sacramentals is to see them as blessings which prepare us for the sacraments, or which continue to share their graces with us. Thus the stages of the adult catechumenate have various blessings and exorcisms which help the candidates prepare for their baptism at the Easter vigil. On Sundays, the blessing and sprinkling of holy water (sacramentary, pages 412-414) reminds us of our baptism and of our membership in Christ, and prepares us to celebrate this eucharist in a more worthy manner.

This approach is applicable for most sacramentals. Some, however, are just blessings that we seek in time of need from our Father who is so good. Among these we could mention the blessing of sick animals.

Rural and Urban

Leafing through a copy of the Roman Ritual (and unless your technical Latin is good, you'd better try it with a translation such as Weller's three volumes), one finds blessings for beehives and printing presses, vines and electrical generators, wheeled vehicles (from chariots to racing cars), and helicopters. Food, wine, chalk, wedding rings, houses, sick animals, children, priestly vestments... the list is lengthy indeed.

While at first one may be tempted to laugh or wonder, one usually ends a voyage through the ritual with two thoughts:

- What a wonderful concern the Church has for its members and for the things and places they use in their daily lives!

- How does one ever hope to keep up with technology (computers, scuba diving equipment, transistors, photocomposition, lasers...) by providing suitable blessings?

The Church's concern is evident in the blessings provided in the rituals of the past. Every phase and aspect of life is encountered, although most of the emphasis is on workaday things. Little evidence is seen of the Western world's avid pursuit of recreation and leisure — perhaps a gentle reproof of our playing while much of the world starves or barely survives in drought, famine, flood and disaster?

Because much of the world has been in a rural milieu, it is only natural that blessings should have been provided for rural situations: crops, farm animals, seeds, vines and fruit trees are important to every farm family. At the same time, the entire nation depends on successful crops, and is therefore similarly concerned.

People who live in cities have many different interests, and these too are reflected in the blessings provided. Many blessings are of value to any community, rural or urban — new schools, hospitals, libraries serve all people. Blessings for homes, for sick persons, and for children can benefit everyone.
Keeping up: The Roman Ritual has added new blessings from time to time since it was first published in 1614. But it is a universal book, and individual nations were expected to add their own blessings and prayers according to local needs and situations. Many countries have done this from time to time.

One wonders, however, if this might be the best solution at present. In the light of the creative spirit fostered by the renewed eucharistic and sacramental liturgy, would it be better to let parishes and communities explore the place of blessings in their lives? Should they have the chance of finding out what a blessing means, and how it should be developed and celebrated? By exploring the meaning of the person, place or thing to be blessed within the context of their community life and worship, it would seem that a much fuller appreciation of blessing would be ours.

It is in this spirit that Bulletin 49 is written. It is an exploration of the meaning of blessing. Prepared as a book of blessings at the request of the National Council for Liturgy, it provides models of blessings. It encourages local communities to pray, to prepare, to celebrate, to follow up. This Bulletin is an invitation to bless God and to seek his blessings upon us.

ALL PRAISE TO GOD

This may be used as a personal prayer of praise. If said by a group, it may be read in unison, or with alternating stanzas; or a reader may read the first few lines, and have the group repeat the closing line of each stanza as a refrain.

Blessed be God, for he has made us,
and made this world for our use.
All praise to God for ever!

Blessed be our Father for his love,
for he sent his only Son to save us.
All praise to God for ever!

Blessed be the Son of God,
who came as one of us, and lived among us.
All praise to God for ever!

Blessed be the Holy Spirit,
who leads us in the ways of God.
All praise to God for ever!

Blessed be God, three persons in one:
to God be all honor and glory.
All praise to God for ever!

Other stanzas may be developed, in accord with the season or feast being celebrated.
The final stanza should be a doxology, such as this:

All praise to God our Father
be given through the Son
in the unity of the Spirit,
one God for ever more.
All praise to God for ever!
BLESSED ARE YOU, LORD GOD

Jesus grew up with a rich scriptural heritage of prayer. Praise and thanksgiving are the primary elements in Jewish blessings, which first of all are prayers for blessing or praising God.¹ These blessings have a direct relationship with the form of our eucharistic prayer.

Berakah means blessing or benediction. It comes from the verb meaning to fall on one’s knees, then make intercession, then bless, then praise God. Thus in Chron. 20:26, we read of the Valley of Beracah, so named because the men of Judah blessed Yahweh there. Scriptural examples include Gen. 14:20 and Ps. 119:12.

The berakah became the standard format or pattern for giving praise and thanks, and even could mean a doxology. As Jewish liturgy developed, the blessing became the characteristic form of their prayer: most paragraphs in their book of prayers ended with a blessing (called “sealing the prayer”). Jews were encouraged to say 100 blessings each day. Each petition ended with a benediction, and continues so in Jewish prayer services today.

The usual form of the berakah begins with “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe.” (This form has recently come back into our lives through its use in the prayers over the bread and wine during the preparation of the gifts at Mass.)

Many Forms

The Jewish berakah took on many forms. A blessing was said before carrying out any of the commandments. A blessing over things that we enjoy leads to blessing of God for giving us food. Formulas were developed for many occasions, even to one to be said when smelling pleasant odors: “Blessed are you, O Lord, our God, king of the universe, who create various kinds of spices.”

The blessing over food is the equivalent to our grace before meals. (Our word “grace” comes from the Latin for “thanks” — thanks to God who created these things that serve as our food.) For the Hebrews, the bread and wine were blessed by praising or blessing God over them; by eating this food, the people shared in God’s blessing.

Other blessings included:

- blessings of praise and thanks in connection with natural phenomena (rainbow, lightning); good or bad news; seeing distinguished persons (because of their wisdom or position).

- blessings of deliverance: praise and thanks were given to God in times of sickness and death; for new things or a seasonal holiday; before reading God’s word in the bible.

Grace after meals: Birkat ha-mazon is the name of the blessing or grace after meals. This practice is considered as a duty in obedience to God’s command (Deut. 8:10):

¹ Further background information on Jewish practices and sample prayers are given in Pierre Dufresne, La Liturgie Familiale — histoire, théologie, pastorale, chapter 1, “L'Ancien Testament et le judaïsme”, pages 19-42. See Helpful reading, at the end of this issue.
You will eat and have all you want,  
and you will bless Yahweh your God  
in the rich land he has given to you.

This prayer probably began at the time of the second temple, and has since received a number of additional passages. Josephus mentioned the practice of this prayer. From a simple Talmudic form:

Blessed be the Merciful One,  
the maker of this bread,

the blessing later developed into a four-part prayer:

• **thanks for nourishment in general**: the Jews praised God and thanked him for providing food for all his creatures.

• **thanks for the goodness of God to Israel**, as revealed in its history: God has saved Israel through the exodus, covenant and law.

• **a petition for the coming of the messianic kingdom**: they prayed for mercy on Israel, and asked God to restore the temple and the kingdom of David. They asked that God would always support and sustain his people.

These three elements formed the core of the grace.

• **a doxology**: added later, the final part of the grace gives general thanks to God for his goodness, and expresses specific spiritual needs, varying according to the day and feast. Sometimes nine or fifteen of these were said.

Present Jewish practice in America tends to a simpler form of the grace.

The grace after meals was a central feature of Jewish home liturgy. It was said only after a meal at which bread was eaten (when the meal was without bread, a shorter form was used). The grace is said at the table, with some bread left until the end of the meal, followed by the blessing of the cup of wine on the Sabbath and other special occasions.

The use of the final cup in Luke 22:20, the cup of blessing which we bless (1 Cor. 10:16, 11:25-30), the prayers used in the *Didache* (chapters 9, 10, 14; see Bulletin 43, pages 80-81) show that the basic approach of the eucharistic prayer is that of a berakah.

* * *

Further thoughts on using the Jewish form of blessing in our prayers and blessings are discussed in *Using the berakah*, below.

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**A PRAYER**

By your Holy Spirit,  
give us a willing heart and a ready hand  
to use all your gifts  
for your praise and glory.

(Based on a prayer by Thomas Cranmer)
CHRISTIAN DEVELOPMENT OF BLESSINGS

A brief outline of blessings in the history of the Church takes us from the time of Christ to the present.

Jesus Christ grew up in a Jewish milieu, and naturally inherited the religious customs and practices of his people. Some examples are mentioned or described in the gospel:

- He blessed God: The brief prayer in Mt. 11:25-26 (see also Lk. 10:21-22) is a berakah, a prayer of praise and thanks.

- He blessed food: Jesus said the blessing or grace before meals. The stories of the multiplication of the loaves picture Jesus taking the loaves and fish, raising his eyes to heaven, saying the blessing or thanksgiving, breaking the loaves, and giving them to his disciples for distribution (see Mt. 14:19; 15:36; Mk. 6:41; 8:6-7; Lk. 9:16; Jn. 6:11). The same series of actions can be seen in the narrative of institution over the bread (and the blessing, or thanks and praise) over the cup in our four eucharistic prayers today.

- He blessed people: We see Jesus laying his hands on children to bless them: see Mt. 19:13-15; Mk. 10:13-16; Lk. 18:15-17. He raises his hands and blesses his apostles at his ascension (Lk. 24:50-51).

- The canticles of Mary (Lk. 1:46-55) and Zechariah (Lk. 1:68-79) are songs of praise, built on a berakah model. The Glory to God of the angels (in Lk. 2:14) is influenced by this form of prayer.

In the early Church, we see blessings being given during the eucharist. Hippolytus describes several of these in his Apostolic tradition, written around the year 215 and reflecting the traditions of the Church at Rome in the closing years of the second century. After the eucharistic prayer, before communion, there are prayers given for blessing oil for use by the sick, and cheese and olives. The description of the Easter vigil includes blessings of milk, honey and water for the new Christians to drink at communion time. Blessings are also given for bread, lamps at nightfall, and new fruit.

Though he presented specific formulas, Hippolytus pointed out that these were models and guides rather than texts to be accepted word for word. The text he gives for blessing cheese and olives is an example of the style used:

Sanctify this milk
that has been coagulated into one mass,
and unite us in your love.

Let your loving kindness remain for ever
upon this fruit of the olive:
it is a type of your generosity
which you caused to flow from the tree
to bring life to those who hope in you.

Glory be to you,
with the Holy Spirit in the holy Church,
now and always and for ever.
From the sixth to the eighth centuries, the Roman sacramentaries include blessings in the (first) eucharistic prayer, just before the *Per quem haec omnia* (Through Christ you give us all these gifts). The *gifts* refer to the oil, milk, honey, first fruits and other items which were blessed at this point, as well as to the eucharistic gifts, the bread of life and cup of salvation.

In the Gallican period, Gaul and Spain developed many blessings, going far beyond the simplicity maintained in Rome. Blessings for vestments and clothing, vessels and objects used in liturgical celebrations, buildings and various types of fruits and vegetables were prepared and included in their sacramentaries.

**In the middle ages,** blessings from various sources were included in pontificals and sacramentaries. Gradually, *rituals* or books of sacraments and blessings became distinct from the sacramentary. Elements of superstition were involved in some of the blessings in use before the time of the Protestant reformation.

**The Council of Trent** left the work of revising and issuing the liturgical books to the pope, but it was not until 1614 that Pope Paul V published the *Roman Ritual*. As well as the sacramental celebrations, it contained only 29 blessings, mainly of things: houses, boats, wedding chamber, food for the Easter dinner, pilgrims. Editions by Benedict XIV and Pius XI added more blessings in an appendix. In 1952, Pope Pius XII reorganized all the blessings and put them into one section of the ritual.

**Vatican II** brought a new setting and atmosphere into the question of blessings. By taking a more profound look at the Church and its place and role in the modern world, the Council led the Church into greater involvement with human affairs as a matter of vital concern to the kingdom of God (Church in the modern world, no. 39). By becoming concerned with marriage and family life, culture, socio-economic life, the life of the political community, and the fostering of peace and community among nations, the Church has set out anew on building up the world until it fulfills its purpose in the plan of God.

- **Sacramentals:** With a background such as this, the paragraphs on the sacramentals in the liturgical constitution (nos. 60-62) take on a broader and more urgent perspective. No longer are we concerned with tinkering about with formulas or new blessings for recent inventions, but with praising God and blessing his creation and our participation in it. A blessing of a home is not just a blessing of mortar and floors, but of the people who live there as a family. A call to conversion — by those who prepare and celebrate and receive blessings — is made by God and his Church. This issue of the Bulletin is a step in this direction.

- **Sacraments:** A fuller awareness of the sacraments as community celebrations of faith, centered in and leading to the eucharist has been one of the results of the Council's renewal. A distinction of roles and a wider use of scripture in sacramental celebrations have led to more developed rituals. In place of excerpts conveniently crammed into a vest pocket book, we have full rituals — introductory pastoral notes, full rites with many options, adaptations for many circumstances, carefully selected scripture readings for this sacrament, and room for national and local developments. A separate ritual for each sacrament replaces a one-book liturgy, in order that the Church may teach us more fully through its liturgical celebrations.
The present age is indeed an age of blessings. Blessed are we who stand on the threshold of the days of renewal! Let us move forward with the Lord Jesus as we join him in saying to the Father:

May your kingdom come!
May your will be done on earth
as it is in heaven,
for holy indeed is your name.

Reform in Progress

In March 1972, the Congregation for Divine Worship considered blessings among other matters. Some of their discussions were summarized in *Notitiae* in April 1972:

- Blessings obtain certain spiritual effects. They bless men and things, or pray for men and their needs.
- The first element in a blessing is thanksgiving and praise toward God (as in the *berakah* prayers used over bread and wine during the preparation of the gifts at Mass).
- A blessing recognizes and proclaims that creation is good, and that our creator looks after us in his providential love. When man gives thanks at various moments in his life, he recognizes and professes that all things have been made by God and come to us from him.
- The use of blessings should increase in the lives of Christians: we ought to continue to advert to God and to his constant guidance of the universe. To help bring this about, it is good to extend the use of blessings to lay persons, especially blessings which belong to their daily life and work.
- Blessings which belong directly to worship are reserved for use by an ordained minister.
- Many different blessings continue in use in today's Church. The Congregation feels that some general theological and pastoral norms are needed to guide and promote the use of blessings.

GIVE A BLESSING INSTEAD

Never pay back one wrong with another, or an angry word with another one; instead, pay back with a blessing. That is what you are called to do, so that you inherit a blessing instead.

*(1 Pet. 3:9, Jerusalem Bible)*
WHO GIVES A BLESSING?

Any Christian can offer praise (blessing) to the Father through Christ. Any Christian can ask the Father through Christ to give his blessing to persons, places or things. When celebrated with other believers in a context of scripture and prayer, and singing if possible, the value of these blessings as acts of worship is increased.

Blessings by the Clergy

Up until the present, only clerical blessings have been recognized as liturgical blessings.

The Church blesses us in many ways. Whenever a bishop, priest, deacon or lay person uses an approved ritual blessing in the manner intended by the Church, it is the Church — the body of Christ — asking the Father in the name of Jesus for his blessing. Official blessings of this type are found in the Mass and sacraments — the blessing of holy water, the solemn blessing at the end of the Mass, the blessing of the oil of the sick are some examples of this.

A priest’s blessing was once considered a special event and an honor in our country. It still is, but the past ten years of reappraisal have led many priests to underestimate the importance of their role in the Church and the value of their prayer.

Designated by vocation and ordination to serve the Christian community, the priest is a teacher, a leader in prayer and worship, and a shepherd and father to his people. He is indeed a Christian, a member of the Church like every other baptized person — but he has been called to serve the people of God in a special priestly role. His leadership is service, and his position is one of co-worker with the bishop.

The priest’s role of blessing is seen in the context of the Church as God’s family. In a home, it is the role of the father to give leadership and to take the initiative, as it is of the pastor in the community. This does not exclude action by others — but the ‘official’ responsibility rests upon the father or pastor. Led by the Spirit of God, he blesses — and calls down God’s blessing — as head of the family, domestic or parochial.

In former years, when the priest was using the official texts and rituals of the Church, he and his people knew with the confidence of faith that God would hear and answer his prayer. People could truthfully say to their priest the words he heard at his ordination: “Whatever you bless will be blessed.”

This trust is beginning to be built up again, as we gradually come back to the full liturgical context of the eucharist, with sacraments, liturgy of the hours, services of the word and sacramentals forming its setting.

The blessings suggested in the second half of this issue of the Bulletin will help all members of the believing community to become more aware of the priestly role of their priests. By personal and family use of blessings, and by working with their priests to prepare for blessings on particular occasions, they will develop a climate of welcome to the blessings of God.
Blessings by Lay Persons

Two points need to be understood clearly:

- Being a layman or laywoman is not a form of spiritual serfdom. The lay person has a true and valuable position in the people of God. Since the Second Vatican Council, the growing awareness of the role of the laity has been an important aspect of the total renewal God is causing in his Church. (See Task of the whole Church in Bulletin 48, pages 93-96.)

- Permitting and encouraging the laity to perform blessings is not taking anything away from the clergy, but rather enhances the role of both the layman and the priest.

* * *

Blessing God: As Catholics become more at home with this form of prayer, it will begin to affect our spiritual approach. We will be more willing to understand the psalms, to celebrate portions of the liturgy of the hours and to appreciate the benefits of asking God's blessings on ourselves, on others, and on our possessions and works. Attitudes of praise and thanksgiving will penetrate our thinking, and we will be better able to prepare for and celebrate the eucharist on the Lord's day.

Blessing people: As a sign of their responsibility and willingness to help their children grow in God's love, parents are asked to make the sign of the cross on their child before his baptism. When explained during the period of preparation for baptism, this portion of the rite has an impact upon those who are serious about their task.

When parents bless their children as a sign (both to themselves and to their children) of their loving care, they are proclaiming their love and asking God's help for their family. By a regular blessing (each night before bed, for example), and by blessings on special occasions (birthdays, family anniversaries, religious feasts, civic holidays), the practice of praising God and asking for his blessing can become a normal part of family life.

Several models for blessings of children are presented in this Bulletin under Blessing people.

Ways of encouraging this practice in a parish, and help for parents who would like to bring it into their homes can be discussed by members of the liturgy committee, preferably together with the family life or education committee and members of the PTA. The practice of blessings could also become part of the preparation for marriage. Catechumens too could be helped to understand the meaning of the blessings they receive, and to grow in their use of the berakah as a form of praise and blessing.

Blessing things: When we bless things, we are proclaiming once more that God is the creator who made everything, and who saw it was good. We are also thanking him for his continuing love and care of us. By blessing things which are part of their daily life and work, Christians are dedicating what they do daily, so that it will be done in the Lord Jesus for the glory of God. Examples of such blessings are given under Blessing places and Blessing things.
DESIGNING A BLESSING

The examples of blessings and prayers presented in this Bulletin are not intended as finished products, ready for instant use by everyone. Rather, they are to be seen as models within the broad context of blessing, models which may be studied and used by an individual or a group in preparing such prayers.

In preparing and adapting these blessings, the members of a community of faith have the opportunity of recognizing more fully the benefits that God bestows on them, and of returning their thanks and praise to him.

Liturgy and Community Life

Liturgical ceremonies cannot make up for lack of pastoral care. Liturgy does not provide instant community or solve all problems. But in a community which is seeking to grow in Christ, the liturgy can build on the strengths and values which are there, and lead to a deepening life in the Spirit of the Lord Jesus.

A parish or community which is striving to be a Christian family is centered around the eucharist. All aspects of its life lead up to the Sunday celebration, and are nourished by it. The prayer life of individuals and families prepares them for Mass, and helps them to live the Mass throughout the week. The living sacrifice that they offer with Christ is not restricted to Sunday, but is part of their daily carrying of the cross.

A truly Christian community is not turned in on itself, but is outgoing. It does not forget that the universal Church is manifested in the local believing community. Diocese, religious community and parish are visible signs of Christ in the world. The strength or feebleness of the light of Christ is judged by the way this community lives.

When a parish is truly convinced of the gospel message, it will find the word of Christ a disturbing presence. The gospel is not intended to soothe as much as to stir up, to lead us forward as God’s pilgrim people. Prosperity, freedom from disturbance, lack of problems, success, respectability — these are the world’s criteria, not Christ’s. By what standards do we judge the “success” of our parish community?

A community which is listening to the full gospel message is going to be aware of its social implications, and is going to be active in working for Christ’s peace and justice at the cost of its own comfort (see Bulletin 40, pages 244-251). The works of mercy (see Bulletin 42, pages 23-25) will be living realities in daily parish and personal life, and not merely lists we memorized as children.

Beginning to Bless

In such a Christian community, the act of blessing will find a fuller meaning. Dedicating a person or place or thing to the service of God and his people will have more meaning in the context of a community that truly lives out its faith. A blessing will not be mere words and empty actions, but will lead this family of God’s children to greater action, to more vigor in advancing his kingdom, to more faithful following of the Lord Jesus.

In beginning to use blessings as suggested in this issue of the Bulletin, the community should remember that it shares in the Spirit of God. He is within each member, to enlighten and guide, to strengthen and encourage, to prod and disturb.

Returning to the practice of blessings will require some effort. Priests, liturgy committee, and others who are interested need to begin honestly, exploring what blessings can mean in today’s Church. They will have to look at creation from God’s point of view, and consider spiritual aspects of life that have become neglected in the last while. At times, they will find themselves needing to overcome prejudices or feelings in order to take a fresh and wholesome view of some part of God’s creation.

Expression of faith: A blessing (or any other liturgical act) is not an empty ceremony to be carried out perfunctorily. It is an expression of faith, an act of meeting with Christ in the world that was made through him and redeemed by him. In preparing and celebrating
a blessing, priests and people will carry on a dialogue with God's word, being confronted by the gospel, and in turn confronting the word with the world of today.

Developing a blessing should not be too easy. In looking at the gospel message, we have to find out by prayer, study and discussion what the object of our blessing means. What does the tradition of our Church and our nation tell us? Are there any contradictions between these traditions? or between Christian tradition and our way of acting? In what ways can our community meet Christ here? What obstacles are we placing in his way?

Remembering that we are not alone in the Church, we should compare our faith and experiences, and share them with other communities, past and present, Christian and non-Christian. What have we to learn from others?

In preparing a blessing celebration, we begin in faith, and go on to express it in words and action. What we say and do should be close to our hearts, and not superficial. We work toward an ideal situation, always remaining in contact with life: we should not be paralyzed into doing nothing merely because we cannot attain perfection.

As we go ahead, we will be able to achieve celebrations which are more profound. A gradual growth in our faith will be expressed by improved liturgy, both in the Sunday eucharist and in our other liturgical expressions: good celebrations deepen our faith, and deeper faith leads to better celebrations — the circle is virtuous, not vicious. Building up the kingdom in our community is slow work, but it will take place gradually.

Sound preparation and hard work are required. Faith and prayer have to go together with earnest meditation and good will. But if a community wishes to go ahead in God's work, it will be able to do so through the use of blessings that come from the heart of the Christian tradition.

Elements of a Blessing

Some of the elements involved in a service of blessing are suggested here. In preparing the celebration, the liturgy committee should endeavor to include these different aspects.*

Praise: We praise God for his glory, and worship him. Psalms and hymns of praise, a berakah, a litany of praise based on scripture texts, or Glory to God in the highest may be sung. As the high priest of creation, mankind voices the praises of the universe for God the creator.

God's word: In a spirit of faith, we listen to God's word. Until recently, many blessings echoed scripture by phrases or allusions, but now the trend is to listen directly to appropriate passages from the bible, to reflect on their meaning for God's people today, and to respond by prayer and action.

Recollection of God's works: In a homily or meditation, the community is helped to remember God's plan for creation, and his providential love for us. The right use of God's creatures should become more apparent as we become more aware of God's ways, for man's dominion of the earth is stewardship, not absolute control. We need the Spirit's light in using creation according to God's intention in making it through his Son.

Sometimes a brief explanation of the history or importance of what is being blessed will be helpful.

Rejoicing: The Christian community rejoices over the goodness of the creation God has given us. Gloomy attitudes toward material things are not Christian: man's constant tendency to go to one extreme or another — to Manichaeism or to materialism — needs to be balanced, to be centered in Christ. The Church teaches us to bless and use ordinary material goods in the service of God, who created them as well as us; at the same time, we are taught to avoid excess, and encouraged to give up legitimate pleasures and to curb our appetites in the service of the cross.

* Some good advice in developing such celebrations is contained in Rediscovering Ritual, by Paul D. Jones, pages 1-8 (see Helpful reading at the end of this Bulletin).
Christian joy is not limited to natural delight over created goods. Our main source of rejoicing is the fact that our Father has chosen us in eternity to be his beloved people, his own daughters and sons. He has saved us through the death-resurrection of Jesus, his Son and our brother. The Father has sealed us with his Spirit, and has let his Spirit of love abide in us as in his temples. Our rejoicing therefore is the expression of our Christian faith.

**Thanksgiving:** Through the Lord Jesus, we continue to thank God for his gifts to mankind. In a blessing, it is appropriate to indicate some of the specific graces and gifts he has bestowed on us, in order that we may deepen our sense of gratitude. This can be done in a berakah, through a litany (based on Psalm 136, and adapted to the circumstances), a hymn or psalm of thanksgiving. The elements of praise and thanks may be combined, or repeated at several times during the celebration.

**Prayer** for others as well as for ourselves is important. The assembled local Church should always reflect the concerns of the Church universal, and not be limited to parochial needs or interests only. Prayer for unity, for the Church and its leaders, for prophets and ordinary Christians, for faith and courage, for the various needs of the Church throughout the world — these are some of the ways we can pray for the Church. In a similar way, the other petitions of the Sunday prayer of the faithful may be expanded or extended. Prayer can have various forms in one service: in unison or by dialogue, responsorial, offered by a leader in the name of all, silent prayer, sung prayer, a series of petitions, spontaneous prayer, or many other forms. (See Bulletin 38, pages 102-103: Creative creed, for further ideas.)

The committee may be free in developing these prayers and many elements of the blessing celebration.

**Action:** A Christian community or individual sees no contradiction in being involved in both prayer and action, since both are necessary in serving God and others. What we bless can be shared with others: food can be shared with the needy, and with others present for the blessing. A building — such as a new school — can be “shared” by an open house on the day it is blessed, as well as by a welcoming attitude and a spirit of community service at all times.

**Music and dancing:** The blessing service itself need not be limited to words. Actions, gestures, music, dancing, listening, silence, dialogue, discussion, as well as visual symbols (banners, posters, lights, color, decorations, flowers), incense, processions involving the entire assembly — these can all help to deepen participation. This involvement will be increased when many persons and groups have been taking part in the spiritual and physical preparations for the event.

*When these various elements are woven together into a harmonious celebration, a service of blessing will be a means of building up the kingdom by leading God’s people forward on his pathways.*

**Ceremonial Notes**

Any service of liturgy or worship should be a celebration by God’s people in joyful praise of their God, asking him humbly for their needs. A few thoughts are offered to help communities to prepare and celebrate these blessings more worthily.

**Full participation** in all the ways mentioned in the Constitution on the liturgy (no. 30) should be promoted during the preparation and celebration of all blessings.

**Arrangement of elements:** A blessing may be considered as a brief bible service: we listen to God’s word, we pray and reflect in response to it, and then we move to action — in this case, the blessing. This is arranged generally along the lines of the service of the word at Mass:

- **An opening**, including one or more of: hymn, procession, sign of the cross, greeting, prayer (both silent and vocal) — these elements precede the liturgy of the word and prepare for it.

- **Scripture:** A minimum of one scripture reading: this may be extended as at weekday Mass (reading, psalm, gospel reading), or as on Sundays (reading, psalm, reading, sung
acclamation, gospel); it is traditional to choose the final reading from the gospels. Silent prayer or reflection is desirable after readings, and where possible, each reading should be proclaimed by a different reader (see GI, no. 71). A homily or reflection leads to the prayer of blessing.

- **Blessing:** This prayer becomes the climax and focal point of the celebration: it is a prayer of faith, offered by the believing community.

- **Closing prayers** may include a litany or general intercessions, perhaps ending with the Lord's prayer. A final blessing may be given to the entire community, especially when the previous blessing was intended for certain members only. A final hymn of praise and thanks closes the celebration, and often leads to an informal continuation over refreshments or a festive meal.

**Source of readings:** When God's word is being proclaimed during the celebration of a blessing, the texts should be read from a dignified book, and by a qualified reader, if possible. A bible or the large copy of *Lectionary for Mass* may be used; in a home or school setting, it would seem preferable to use the bible that belongs there, or that will be kept and used there from then on. Suggestions on carrying the bible or lectionary in procession are given in Bulletin 46, pages 310-312.

- **Finding the readings:** The indices at the back of the lectionary help locate texts which are given in it. To find a particular text, look in the Sunday-feria! index, pages 905-918, and then in the index of other Masses, pages 919-926. (These pages refer to the Canadian edition; the index is found at the back of the book in all editions.) When a text is given both in the Sunday section and in another part of the book, it is better to use the Sunday text, since the Canadian edition gives this in larger type and in senselines for better proclamation.

- **What about non-scriptural readings?** In the scriptures, God speaks to his people, and invites them to respond to his word in faith and love. Such assent of faith cannot be demanded for or given to non-scriptural works, even the writings of the saints. It is the Church's practice, in the liturgy of the Mass, sacraments and blessings, to use only scriptural readings. (In the liturgy of the hours, some non-scriptural lessons are included as commentaries on God's word. These writings are traditionally by saints, popes and other approved and accepted spiritual writers, formed in the Church, and reflecting the Christian faith.)

In giving blessings, we firmly recommend that only scripture texts should be used as readings. Other texts may serve to provide helpful insights to those who design the blessings, and even inspire some of the prayers; but these readings should not be proposed to the faith of the people as though equal to the word of God.

**Homily:** After the scripture reading (or before the blessing if there should happen to be no reading), the leader of the celebration should see that a moment is spent in reflection on God's love and his wonderful work in creation and redemption. A brief homily, or sharing of personal and prayerful reflections, may be helpful to all. This is not a time for nervous jokes or for speeches, but rather for sincere meditation and sharing of spiritual insights.

If the leader does not think that he or anyone else in the group, after due preparation, can give a brief homily or reflection, he may invite all to meditate on the word or actions of God during a few moments of silent prayer.

**Prayers and blessings:** After we have prepared a prayer or blessing, should we read it or just proclaim it in our own words? The advice of Hippolytus,* written in 217 A.D. about the eucharistic prayer, is of interest in this matter:

Certainly one need not memorize and say, in his thanking, the exact words we have written: each one should pray according to his own ability. It is good if he can pray well with an expressive prayer. But even if he is able to express his prayer and praise only moderately well, no one should stop him. His prayer should be a sound expression of the faith.

*Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition, I, 10:4-6.*
Prayers should use and echo phrases of the scriptures (see Liturgy constitution, nos. 24 and 121). This scriptural inspiration is one of the ways in which the Spirit teaches us to pray according to the mind of God.

**Gestures of blessing:** Gestures and symbolism are part of the Jewish and Christian traditions, and help us to reach out to God. A number of gestures may be used during or after the prayer of blessing by the person acting as leader of the celebration:

- **Cross:** A cross may be made in the air, over the person or object to be blessed; a small cross may be traced with the thumb on the person's forehead, or on the object. When a group is being blessed, all may make the sign of the cross as usual, or trace a cross on their forehead. The usual three crosses are made when the gospel is proclaimed.

- **Hands:** According to circumstances, the leader may extend his hands toward or over the persons or objects being blessed, or lay his hands upon them.

- **Holy water:** In recent years, the Church is tending to see holy water as a reminder of baptism, and therefore uses it mainly in blessings for persons. It is not sprinkled about indiscriminately.

- **Incense:** Used as a symbol of purification and prayer, incense may add solemnity to a procession, gospel reading, or blessing.

When carried out with dignity and in a spirit of faith, ritual gestures help to express and deepen the faith of all who take part in the celebration.

**Bilingual:** Many parishes in Canada are bilingual, and some have other major language groups in their community. As an example of what is possible, several of our contributors prepared some prayers in French.

In multicultural parishes, the readings, hymns, prayers and other elements of the blessing may be in various languages. Other gestures and forms of ritual may be more expressive in that locality, or may reflect a particular national tradition. Pastoral considerations should guide those who prepare and carry out each celebration.

**Textual adaptations:** Since the models in this Bulletin are of necessity somewhat general, those preparing and celebrating blessings should adapt them according to local needs and circumstances, changing from singular to plural, revising words and phrases, adding more scriptural echoes to the prayer of blessing, selecting other readings, psalms and hymns, or by choosing other elements or arrangements.

**Continuing Influence**

The effects of a blessing do not end on the day it is celebrated. Most blessing prayers ask for God's continuing blessing, and we know he is always with us in his loving providence. But human as we are, we need to have occasions that stir up in us the grace of God, that recall for us the blessings that God has given us in the past, and those that he wants to share with us now. Some of these occasions could be:

**For a parish or community:** Specific blessings could be connected with yearly celebrations such as the feasts of the patron saints, anniversary of dedication of the parish or cathedral churches, or of the founding of the parish or diocese; ordination anniversaries of the bishop, of the priests of the parish. Some ideas for these celebrations are contained in *Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy — 1975 Liturgical Calendar*, pages 39-41, and in the individual diocesan supplements at the back of the calendar.

**For a family:** Certain blessings and prayers could be attached to specific family celebrations, such as wedding anniversaries, baptismal days, birthdays, anniversaries of deceased members of the family.

Using some of the ideas contained in the following pages, a family or community can develop further blessings and celebrations that help them continue to be faithful and fervent in the service of the Lord.
WE BLESS GOD

USING THE BERAKAH

The Jewish form of blessing and praising God for his goodness is called the berakah. Explained in Blessed are you, Lord God in this issue, it can form a simple basis for personal, family and community prayer. This article presents some suggestions for its use by Christians today.

Christian Tradition

The use of the berakah is a Christian tradition, since our Church was founded in a Jewish milieu. Christ, his apostles and the first Christians were Jews, and this has influenced us ever since. The Old Testament is Jewish scripture; the psalms and many of our prayer forms are based on synagogue worship forms. The eucharistic prayer is considered to be a form of berakah.

Jesus: Growing up in the Jewish tradition, our Lord came to know and use the blessing as part of his daily prayer. As a child, he would hear Joseph blessing food and cups of wine. His mother, like every Jewish woman, would open the Sabbath by the lighting and blessing of the lamp.1

Jesus blessed or praised God his Father (see Mt. 11:25-26; Lk. 10:21; Jn. 12:28). The gospels picture Jesus blessing bread (see Mt. 14:19 and Mk. 6:41, for example). Such a blessing means giving praise and thanks (compare the narrative of institution in the eucharistic prayer) to God who alone is good (Ps. 118:1; Mk. 10:18); all good comes to us from him (Ps. 102; James 1:17). Man blesses and praises God and proclaims his unlimited goodness: God is the blessed One (see Ps. 119:12; Rom. 9:5).

Jesus also blessed children (Mk. 10:16) and his apostles (Lk. 24:50).

Paul wrote a magnificent blessing in Eph. 1:3-14: it should be read once more as a hymn of praise and thanks to God, words that each of us can repeat as a prayer expressing our feelings toward the Father who calls us in Christ and seals us with the promised Spirit. This passage may be used as a splendid model for a Christian berakah.

Early Christians used the berakah in their prayers: the Didache, a book of instruction on prayers and practices, dated between the first and third centuries, uses this form frequently.2 The present order of Mass includes two blessings in this format, over the bread and wine as the gifts are prepared.

Use in Personal Prayer

Without becoming too formal or fixed, the berakah form could provide Christians with a fresh approach to prayer. Moving out of memorized or read forms, it provides a sound framework upon which an individual can build his own prayers. By being objective and God-centered, it helps the individual to avoid tendencies to narrowness or self-seeking. Frequent use of this form of blessing can provide us with daily reminders of the gifts God has showered on us. Such prayers help us to "count our blessings" and to thank God for them.

These prayers can be included with those we normally say, or can used at occasional moments when we want to pray. For persons who have stopped praying regularly, the berakah can be a ladder to lead them back to prayer once more.

2 See Bulletin 43, pages 80-81, for some examples; see also A First Century Lord's Supper, a filmed dramatization and comparison of the Jewish Sabbath Kiddush meal prayers and chapters 9-10 of the Didache. Another film in this series is The Eucharistic Prayer of Hippolytus, a third century eucharist at Rome. Both films are produced by the Murphy Center for Liturgical Research, Notre Dame University, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556, U.S.A.
Some examples are offered here as starters for individual development. They are models of prayers that an ordinary family could use.

**Morning prayer:** Each member of the family can praise God for himself, for his gifts in general, and for the particular gifts to individuals. The father of the family could pray in this manner:

Blessed are you, Lord God,  
king of the universe:  
you have called us to live today in your love.  
Help us to love you and serve you today.

Blessed are you, Lord God,  
king of the universe:  
you have given me Susan as my dear wife,  
and Tom, Mary, Jimmie and Anne as our children.  
Look after them, Father,  
and help me to be a good husband and father today.

I ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen!

Particular needs, such as sickness or school exams, or special events such as a holiday or holy day, a family feast, a special anniversary, could be mentioned by each member of the family in personal prayer, as well as in prayer together. For example:

Blessed are you, Lord God,  
king of the universe:  
today we celebrate Mary's birthday.  
Help her to be happy and healthy,  
and let her grow up in your love.

A younger child about to begin school could easily learn the opening formula and structure of the prayer in his pre-school years. He could be encouraged to develop it according to daily circumstances (as in many homes, the *God bless mommy and daddy* prayer is adapted). A simple formula could begin in this way:

Blessed are you, Lord God,  
king of the universe:  
Thank you for making me.  
Help me to be a good boy today,  
and bless mommy and daddy,  
and Tom and Mary and Anne.  
Help Uncle John to get better from his operation.

Glory be to you, Father,  
through Jesus the Lord. Amen!

**Night prayer:** Individual members of the family could use similar prayer forms at night, and could include petitions such as these:

Blessed are you, Lord God,  
king of the universe:  
you have let me live today  
with Jesus as my helper.

Forgive me for any wrong I have done:

*He could pause for a moment of silent recollection.*

Help me to do better tomorrow,  
and teach me to love you more.

**Grace at meals:** In many homes, mealtime grace is the only form of family prayer presently in use. As a variation from the standard “Bless us, O Lord,” or from individual compositions, the *berakah* form may bring another dimension of prayer: in a way, this
helps to relate the family meal and the Christian eucharist. Praise and thanksgiving to God, as well as asking his blessing, would help all to appreciate the goodness and love of our heavenly Father. Different persons could offer the prayer at each meal. Some forms are suggested below, and these can be adapted to special days and needs:

Father in heaven,
we bless you and praise your name.
You have given us this food:
help us to be thankful to you
and to live together in love.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

A prayer for use on Sundays:

Father of Jesus,
we bless you on this Lord's day.
We thank you for this food that you give us,
and for the bread of life we have eaten today.

Make us concerned for all who are without food,
for they are your children too.

Glory be to you for ever!

Another form of the grace could be developed by having one member of the family begin the prayer, with the rest adding a sentence.

Grace after meals: Following the example of the Jewish birkat-ha-mazon (see Blessed are you, Lord God, above), the grace after meals could include the following points, at least on Sundays and special occasions. It could be said by one person or by different members of the family:

Father,
we thank you and praise you
for giving food to all creatures,
and for nourishing us in this meal together.

We thank you for saving us
through your Son Jesus,
and for calling us to be your people.
Help us to live as your holy servants.

May your kingdom come among us.
Let all men accept Jesus as Lord and king,
and bring us all to eternal salvation.

Look upon our family today.
Bless us and help us to love you more.
Help our parish during these days of Lent,
and lead our people back to you.
Help Mary Jones and Georges Ouellette
as they prepare for their marriage next month.

Father,
we praise you through Christ
in the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

The grace could be expanded as above, or simply consist of several brief phrases. The Amen could be sung once or several times to a familiar tune (see CBW, nos. 216-220).
Family prayer at other times: One of the problems about family prayer is that most Catholics are embarrassed by not knowing how to express prayers aloud. The use of the prayer of the faithful can be one way of overcoming this awkwardness, and the berakah is another.

When all the members of the family become accustomed to the practice of blessing the Lord for his goodness, they will not be as shy about doing this aloud in the presence of the rest. All will be familiar with the general format of the prayer, and can word individual petitions or words of praise in simple terms. Communities and small groups where the prayer of the faithful is used in this way have found themselves comfortable with its format after a few tries at using it.

Parish help: There are many ways in which the parish can help people to grow in prayer (see Bulletin 44, pages 164-183). One additional way is to teach people the berakah or blessing as a traditional and simple way of praising God. Through bulletins and bulletin inserts, at meetings, in homilies on days when a berakah is in one of the readings, on any occasion calling for public prayer, the parish would endeavor to help people to become comfortable with this form of prayer. (It is not totally unfamiliar: the opening phrases of the divine praises were such blessings.)

In blessings: Another way of helping the community to become more accustomed to the berakah is through its use in blessings. Many examples of these are offered in the following pages.

Spontaneity

While at first it may seem difficult to use the blessing with facility, practice and continuing scripture reading will help to make it a normal part of our prayer life. As we read each day of the actions and teaching of Jesus, we can learn to thank God in easy, simple prayers. After reading the beatitudes, for example, one could breathe the prayer:

Blessed are you, O Lord, our God,  
king of all creation:  
you have sent your beloved Son to teach us.  
Open our hearts to his words and change our lives.

This prayer can be worded even more simply, as long as it blesses (praises, thanks) the Father for his goodness; it usually continues on with a petition.

Frequent use of simple blessings (we used to call such quick prayers "ejaculations") can be practised on many ordinary occasions:

Praise to you, Lord God,  
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Thank you for this wonderful day you have given us.

In time of need, one could pray:

Blessed are you, Father.  
Teach us to accept your will,  
and help us in our time of need.

After meeting a friend (or someday, please God, while friends are together):

Praise be to you, Father of Jesus.  
You have made us friends:  
help us to serve you in love and peace  
until we come to eternal joy with you.

Daily efforts in this manner will gradually lead to spontaneous and familiar prayer.

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8 Further background on the berakah and suggestions for family prayer are contained in La Liturgie Familiale, by Pierre Dufresne: see Helpful reading at the end of this issue.
A Prayer of Value

The berakah is a good form of prayer, both objective and personal. It helps the person who prays to pray objectively, praising God, recollecting his wonderful works. It leads us to thank him for his many gifts, and for particular acts of goodness. It helps us to be more in tune with the prayer life of the Church, with the psalms and liturgy of the hours. The prayers used in scripture — the canticles of Mary and Zechariah in Lk. 1, for example — become more understandable when we see them as forms of berakah. Many of the psalms and their acclamations of praise become easier to use when we are familiar with the Jewish practice of blessing God for his goodness.

Blessed be God!
Blessed be his holy name!

* * *

Some Examples

Several examples of prayers in the form of a blessing or berakah are given in the following pages. These may serve as models of personal, family and group prayer. By developing and using prayers in this manner, we will gradually become more familiar with this traditional prayer form.

The prayers included below are:
1. Prayers before and after scripture reading
2. Children’s prayer
3. A sick person’s prayer
4. In time of sorrow
5. A traveller’s prayer
6. Thanksgiving for music
7. Praise for a beautiful day
8. Glory be to God!

Numbering of psalms: In this issue of the Bulletin, the psalms are numbered according to the Jerusalem Bible. A simple table for converting from Vulgate references is given in the Canadian edition of the lectionary, page 928.

GOD’S WORD

The next issue of the National Bulletin on Liturgy, entitled Reading God’s word: the lectionary, will be ready for mailing at the beginning of September. Bulletin 50 will be a practical and pastoral study of the lectionary.

This Bulletin will be addressed to priests, readers, teachers, liturgy committee members, musicians, and all parishioners involved in preparing, celebrating and living the liturgy. Bulletin 50 will help them to understand the place of scripture in the liturgy, and will be a useful guide to a more beneficial use of the lectionary.

Extra copies of Bulletin 50 may be ordered now for September delivery; prices and the address are given on the inside front cover of this issue.
PRAYER AND GOD’S WORD

Before reading scripture:

Praise to you, Father,
creator of all good things:
you have sent your Spirit to lead us in truth.
Guide me as I read your holy word,
and open my heart to your love.
Lead me to believe your truth
and to live it throughout the day.

Glory be to you, Father
through Jesus your Son. Amen!

After reading scripture:

Blessed are you, Lord God,
maker of heaven and earth,
ruler of the universe:
you have sent your Holy Spirit
to teach your truth to your holy people.
I praise you for letting me read your word today.

Grant that I may continue to think and pray
over the words I have read,
and to share your thoughts with others
throughout this day.

Father, I praise you
and thank you in Jesus’ name. Amen!

CHILDREN’S PRAYER

Children should be encouraged to bless God for his gifts to them and others. A simple form of a blessing for their prayer is given here. Children may wish to adapt it for use on special days: their parents’ wedding anniversary, birthdays, family occasions, children’s birthdays. It may be used at table or in family prayer, or it could be used in personal prayer.

A younger child may prefer a prayer like this:

Dear God,
thank you for giving us our mother and father.
Bless them and make them happy.

Older children may prefer a more formal type of prayer:

Father in heaven,
we give you thanks for all your gifts,
for calling us to be your sons and daughters,
and for giving us Jesus as our brother.

Bless our parents for their love
and for being our first teachers in the faith.
Help us to love them and obey them,
and bring us all into your eternal kingdom.

Father, we ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen!
A SICK PERSON’S PRAYER

Loving Father,
I praise you and thank you
for the gifts you have given me:
for life and faith,
for my family and friends.
Bless those who help me in my time of need.

Now that I am sick and in pain,
help me to accept this cross.
Not my will, Father,
but your will be done.

Accept my suffering and my prayer
through Jesus your Son. Amen!

IN TIME OF SORROW

Blessed are you, Lord God,
ruler of all creation:
we praise you for all the gifts you have showered upon us.
Help us in our time of sorrow,
lift us when we are crushed,
for we entrust our lives into your hands, Father,
through Christ our Lord. Amen!

A TRAVELLER’S PRAYER

Written 31,000 feet above the Maritimes, this prayer is an example of the way the “berakah” can be used to praise God for his creation.

Blessed are you, Lord God,
ruler of all creation:
you have made this beautiful world.
We praise you for letting us admire this sight —
these mountains and forests,
these rivers, lakes and seas.

We thank you for calling us to be your people,
your Church in your servant Jesus Christ.
Help us to continue in your love,
O Lord our God.
Alleluia! Father, we praise you, alleluia!

A similar prayer could be used on a mountain top, at a scenic lookout, while driving, sailing or flying, or at any time when we want to praise God for the wonderful world he has made.

Other thoughts on a prayer for travellers were given in Bulletin 34, page 121, and in Bulletin 40, page 215; see also blessing no. 18, below.
THANKSGIVING FOR MUSIC

Blessed are you, Lord God,
king of the universe:
you have created the world in harmony
and have given mankind musical talents.

We praise you for giving us voices to sing with,
and ability to make musical instruments,
woodwinds, percussion, and strings.
We thank you for orchestras and choirs,
for composers and arrangers.
We praise you for giving us the ability
to make radios and records and tapes.

Father of all, we praise you and sing your glory.
Accept our music as we offer it to you
in the unity of your Spirit
through Christ our Lord. Amen!

A prayer for thinkers, writers, artists and craftsmen is given in Bulletin 45, page 256.

A BEAUTIFUL DAY

We may bless or praise God on any occasion. A beautiful day can give us a reason
for thanking him spontaneously for his many gifts.

Father of Jesus,
we praise you and give you glory
for the wonderful things you do for us:
for life and health,
for this splendid summer's day.
for friends and family.

For these reasons, we pray as Jesus taught us:

Our Father . . .

GLORY BE TO GOD!

A pure shout of praise, thanks, glory and honor is an act of worship: a doxology is
such a prayer. Examples are given at the conclusion of various prayers throughout this issue.
We may use simple formulas, such as the "Glory be to the Father," or develop a personal
prayer like this:

Let us give glory to the Father,
through the Son,
in the Holy Spirit,
for God has made us his people,
and calls us to sing his praises.

All honor and glory and thanks belong to him,
and praise and worship too.
To God be glory in his Church *
for ever and ever! Amen! Alleluia!

* "In his Church." See Eph. 3:21; also Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition, I, 6:4.
BLESSING PEOPLE

The picture of Jesus blessing children is a familiar one to us. The gospels also record that he blessed his apostles and the sick. The tradition of blessing people — of asking God's special protection, guidance and help for them, their lives and their activities — is fully in accord with the liturgical life of the Church.

In the following pages, some ideas for blessing people are described. Parishes and families are encouraged to take these suggestions as starting points for further discussion and action. The prayers and outlines given here are but models for local development, so that each community or family may offer a truly personal prayer to God for his help.

Blessings for people: Some examples of blessings are included in this section. Other ways of using these models are suggested in the pastoral notes at the beginning of each one.

9. Blessing an adult
10. Blessing a sick adult
11. Parental blessing for children
12. Blessing of a child
13. Blessing a sick child
14. Blessing of a family gathering
15. Blessing a woman before childbirth
16. Blessing a woman after childbirth
17. Blessing of an elderly person
18. Blessing for travellers
19. Note on blessing of throats

BLESSING AN ADULT

No. 9

A simple form of blessing. It may be used by friends, by husband and wife at the beginning or end of the day, by an engaged couple, or by members of a group or meeting. Some ideas from Designing a blessing may be incorporated at times to make this a more formal prayer.

Another form which may be used is the blessing of Aaron (or Mizpah blessing) from Num. 6:24-26 (this is also given in the sacramentary, page 630, as the first solemn blessing for ordinary time).

Even a simple “God bless you” is a form of blessing to be encouraged more often in our Christian contacts with others.

Sign of the cross together.

If desired, a favorite or seasonal passage of scripture may be read aloud.

One person
May God, who loves us all,
give you his choicest blessings,
and fill your life with joy.

Other person
May he bless you also,
and guide you in his ways.

Together
May almighty God bless us,
Father, Son † and Holy Spirit. Amen!

A kiss or gesture of peace may conclude the blessing.

172
BLESSING A SICK ADULT

Many prayers and readings for the sick are contained in *Pastoral Care of the Sick and Rite of Anointing*. These may be adapted for use by sick persons and by those who visit them. In the sickroom, it is good to have a bible, New Testament or book of psalms; a crucifix and holy pictures or statues (preferably good art); holy water within reach of the sick person. Since sickness often provides time and inclination for greater prayer and reflection, these moments should be encouraged.

The blessing is often deepened in its effects when a brief scripture reading or psalm is part of the rite.

This blessing may be developed by members of the family, and may be led by a member of the family, by a friend or relative, or by the priest. A prayer that may be said by those who visit the sick is found in Bulletin 46, page 279.

PARENTAL BLESSING FOR CHILDREN

The blessing of children by their parents, a custom mentioned in the scriptures, is a practice that is once more beginning to take its rightful place in family living. A strong French-Canadian tradition continues this blessing on New Year's day.

In some families, the parents or the father will bless the gathered children each evening before they go to bed, or the individual children before they go to sleep.

Some suggestions to help each family develop its own rite:

**Simple form:** Each parent kisses and hugs the child, makes the sign of the cross on his forehead (as done in the baptismal rite), or lays his hands on the child's head in silence, and asks God to bless him:

- **Parent** Heavenly Father,
- **Child** May God bless you, N.,
- **Another rite:**
- **Parent** May he guide you in life.
- **Child** And keep us from strife.
- **Parent** May God bless you, N.
- **Child** And may he bless you too, Mommy.*

**Dialogue:** Another form may be chosen. If both parents give the blessing, they may alternate in the prayers:

- **Parent** May God help you and keep you.
- **Child** May he bless you this evening.

**Lord's day:** The family may wish to develop a special form of this blessing for the Lord's day (Saturday and Sunday evenings).

* This will naturally vary from family to family.
BLESSING OF A CHILD  

No. 12

a) Blessing of a child: A passage from scripture (such as Mt. 18:1-5; Mt. 19:13-16; Mt. 21:14-16; Mk. 9:35-37) is read.

    Heavenly Father,  
    lover of all mankind,  
    we praise you for giving us Jesus as our savior:  
    he blessed the children who came to him,  
    and welcomes those who come to him now.  
    Look with love upon N.  
    and protect him (her) with your love.  
    May he (she) grow in wisdom and age and strength  
    in your presence and in the sight of all.  

    We ask this blessing, Father,  
    through your beloved Son, Christ our Lord.

    The person who gives the blessing may lay his hands on the child's head, or make  
    the sign of the cross upon his forehead, as done in the preparatory rites for baptism.

    If desired, the celebration may conclude with the singing of the Lord's prayer.

b) Blessing of a newborn child: see blessing no. 16, below.

BLESSING OF A SICK CHILD  

No. 13

A crucifix and holy pictures or statues, and holy water should be in the sickroom.  
A bible, New Testament or book of psalms may be helpful. According to the child's age,  
parents should try to help him to accept his suffering with Jesus.

    When a child is seriously sick, parents, brothers and sisters, relatives, friends and  
    neighbors may want to pray together for him. If the child is old enough to understand,  
    he may wish to join them in prayer.

    This blessing may be led by a priest or deacon, or by the parents, or other member  
    or friend of the family. Any of the prayers may be adapted according to circumstances.  
    When the child is in a hospital, this blessing may be offered at home, church or in the  
    hospital chapel, if it is not possible to celebrate it in the child's room.

    After the sign of the cross by all, the leader invites them to pray:

    Let us ask God to bless N.  
    and to have mercy on us all.

    All pause for silent prayer.

    Heavenly Father,  
    you love us all.  
    Have mercy on us, and listen to our prayer  
    as we ask you to help N.  
    Bless him (her), for he (she) is your beloved child.  

    Father, we ask this grace  
    in the name of Jesus our Lord.

    Amen!

    All listen quietly to a brief reading from God's word. Suitable readings may be chosen  
    from the lectionary or Weekday Lectionary — study edition, nos. 871-875, or from Pastoral  
    Care of the Sick and Rite of Anointing, nos. 153-229. Particularly apt readings are found in:
Reference | Anointing book | (Weekday) lectionary
--- | --- | ---
Is. 61:1-3a | no. 161 | no. 800
James 1:2-4, 12 | — | no. 877(3)
Heb. 4:14-16; 5:7-9 | no. 177 | (no. 41)
Ps. 23(22) | no. 249 | no. 765(2)
Ps. 63(62) | no. 189 | no. 603
Ps. 71(70) | no. 190 | no. 634
Ps. 86(85) | no. 191 | no. 463(1)
Ps. 143(142) | no. 196 | no. 791(10)
Dan. 3:52-56 | — | no. 398(1)
Mt. 8:5-13 | no. 206b | see no. 376
Mt. 19:13-15 | — | no. 418
Jn. 6:51-58 | no. 258 | no. 793(12)
Jn. 10:11-18 | no. 223 | no. 279

After the readings, all pause in silence to reflect on the word and will of God. They may wish to share their reflections, if this will not be too tiring for the sick child. A priest or deacon may give a short, informal homily. Then the leader says a prayer in the name of all:

Lord Jesus,
full of tenderness for little ones and for the humble,
send your blessings upon this sick child, N.
May it be for him (her) a source of comfort
in his (her) time of sorrow,
strength in suffering,
and hope in moments of despair.
And “so that the words of God
may be displayed in him (her),” ¹
restore good health to him (her).
Take N. by the hand ²
to return him (her) to his (her) family,
full of your life and your love.
Lord Jesus, hear our prayer,
for you live and reign for ever and ever.³
or:
Seigneur Jésus,
plein de tendresse pour les petits et les humbles,
fais descendre ta bénéédiction sur cet enfant malade;
qu’elle soit pour lui (elle)
source de réconfort dans la peine,
de soutien dans la souffrance,
d’espérance dans l’incertitude.
Et, “pour que les œuvres de Dieu
soient manifestés en lui (elle),” ¹
redonne-lui la santé
et conduis-le (la) par la main ²
pour le (la) remettre à sa famille,
plein(e) de ta vie et de ton amour.³

¹ See Jn. 9:3.
² See Mt. 9:26.
³ Closing prayer contributed by Rev. Albert Lafrenière, Winnipeg, chairman of the Western Liturgical Conference.
The leader may recall the child's baptism:

N., when you were baptized,
you were marked with the cross of Jesus.
I (we) make this cross on you once again,
and ask the Lord to restore you to health.

The leader (and others, according to circumstances) may make a small sign of the cross, on the child's forehead. Instead of the sign of the cross, the leader may impose hands on the child's head, while all pray in silence. If the child is old enough not to be frightened by the gesture, all may take turns and impose their hands in silence on his head.

Then the leader invites all to sing or say the Lord's prayer:

God has made us all his sons and daughters,
and Jesus is our brother.
Let us join Christ as we pray in the words he gave us:

Our Father . . .

The child's father or mother may ask God's blessing on the child in these or similar words:

May God bless you, N.,
and help you to get better soon.
May he help us all to love him.
In the name of the Father, and of the + Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen!

He was made an infant for infants, sanctifying infancy; a child among children, sanctifying childhood, and setting an example of filial affection, of righteousness and of obedience.

**BLESSING OF A FAMILY GATHERING**

*At Christmas dinner, by the father of the family:*

Father in heaven,
we praise you for giving us your Son
to be our savior and Lord.
Bless us all as we gather here today (tonight),
and let us live happily in your love
throughout this coming year.

Hear our prayer, loving Father,
for we ask this in Jesus' name.

The parents may conclude by a ritual gesture — laying their hands on their children and other guests, or by a sign of the cross on their foreheads, by a kiss or handclasp or embrace, or by inviting each person to sign himself or another person. All wish one another the peace of Christ, and continue the meal.

A similar prayer may be used at Easter, Thanksgiving, birthdays, anniversaries, and other family gatherings.
This blessing may be given at home or in church. Husband, family and friends are invited to come and pray with the expectant mother for the safe delivery of her child. The prayers and readings may be selected from those given here, or from other parts of the scriptures.

It would seem preferable to have this blessing given by a priest from the parish as one of the steps of the preparation of this family for the baptism of their child, but another person may give it.

The celebration may begin with a hymn to Mary as the mother of our Lord (see CBW, nos. 308-316). After the sign of the cross, the leader invites all to pray:

**Leader** We join in prayer for N. and her child, and ask God to protect them.

*All pause for silent prayer.*

**Leader** Heavenly Father, creator of all life, you have given life to N.'s child. Protect her as she carries her child in her womb, and bring her to a safe delivery. May her child be baptized into the life of Jesus, and lead a life pleasing to you.

We ask this, Father, in the name of Jesus your Son.

*All* Amen!

A reading from scripture is proclaimed. It may be chosen from these passages: Eph. 3:14-21; Col. 1:9-14; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Jn. 4:7-21; 1 Jn. 5:1-5.

A psalm may be sung, or the canticle of Mary (see CBW, no. 400).

A passage from the gospel is proclaimed, perhaps from: Mk. 9:33-37; Mk. 10:13-16; Lk. 1:39-45, or 39-56, or 46-56; Lk. 2:1-7, or 8-21.

The leader may encourage all to ponder these words in their hearts (see Lk. 2:19), or may invite them to share a few reflections on God's word.

He leads the gathering in a brief litany. If desired, the response may be sung (see CBW, pew edition, page 67).

**Leader** Father, bless us as we gather here.

*All* Lord, hear our prayer.

**Leader** Look with love upon N. and her child. B. Grant her a safe delivery. B. May her child be strong and healthy. B. Bring her child to new life in baptism. B. Guide N. and N. as they raise their family in your sight. B. Bless all the families in our community. B.

**Leader** Loving Father, look with love upon N. and her child. Bless her husband, and guide them in their lives. May their child grow in wisdom, age and grace in your presence and before all men.
We praise you, Father, and ask this grace through Christ our Lord.

All Amen!

Leader Let us use this holy water
as a reminder of our baptism,
and with the prayer that your child
will share with us all
in the blessings of Christian life.

The leader may sprinkle holy water on the woman, or she may take it and make the sign of the cross.

Leader Together let us pray for N. and her child,
using the prayer that Jesus taught us:

All Our Father . . .

Blessing

Leader N. and N.,
may God our Father bless you and protect you both,
and bring your child to a safe birth.

All Amen!

Leader May the Spirit of God lead you,
and guide the steps of your child throughout this life,
and bring us all to the joys of heaven.

All Amen!

The celebration may close with a psalm or hymn of thanks.

**BLESSING A WOMAN AFTER CHILDBIRTH**

No. 16

a) Blessing of mother and child: When a baby is born safely, the normal time for the blessing of the mother and her child is at the end of the baptismal celebration (see Rite of Baptism for Children, no. 70 or 105).

b) Informal blessing of newborn child and his (her) parents: Friends and relations may wish to give a simple blessing in these or similar words:

Blessed are you, Lord God, king of the universe:
you have given us joy in the birth of this child.

May he (she) be strong and healthy,
and grow to full maturity in Christ.
Let him (her) become holy,
a leader among your people,
and a source of strength and encouragement for all.

Lord God, our Father,
bless his (her) parents and family,
and let him (her) grow in wisdom, age and grace
before you and all men.

*Another form of this blessing may be based on Lk. 1:76-79.*

178
c) Blessing of a mother whose child has died: When a baby is stillborn, or dies before
the parish celebration of baptism, the following blessing may be given to the mother.

As spiritual leader of the community, the priest celebrates this blessing in the parish
church, in a spirit of understanding and consolation. Accompanied by her husband, relatives
and close friends, the mother comes to the front of the church. All may remain in the front
pews during the blessing, if desired.

Suggested elements for the blessing are outlined here. The celebrant should adapt
them with pastoral judgment according to circumstances.

- **Candles** may be lighted on the altar; should the parents be invited to hold lighted
candles during part of the service?

- **Music and singing** will depend greatly on the family involved. This could be
discussed during preparations for the celebration.

- **Welcome**: In a few simple words, the priest invites the group to pray, and expresses
his sympathy and that of the parish family. He may say:

  In the name of the Father,
  and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
  we welcome you to the house of God.

  May he grant you his consolation and strength;
  may our prayers help you to accept his will,
  and to bless his holy name.

  A hymn or song of praise may be sung.

- **Scripture**: The readings from scripture point out God’s love, his care for us, the
  suffering of Christ our brother: see Rom. 5:1-8; Rom. 8:1-6, or 9-11, or 14-18, or 26-32,
or 28-39; Eph. 1:3-14; Eph. 3:14-21; Heb. 5:7-10; James 1:2-4, 12-18.

- **Response**: A pause for silent reflection and prayer may follow the first reading.
  Then a responsorial psalm may be sung or said, chosen from Psalms 100, 113, 121, 131,
or selected verses from Ps. 119.

- **Gospel**: Mt. 5:1-10; Mt. 6:7-13, or 7-15; Mt. 11:25-30; Mt. 25:31-40, or 31-46;
  Mk. 4:35-41; Mk. 10:46-52; Lk. 2:22-35; Lk. 4:16-22b; Lk. 6:17-23; Lk. 8:19-21; Lk. 9:22-26;

- **Homily**: Rather than giving a formal homily, the priest may explain God’s word
  for those present, helping them to realize God’s providential and fatherly love, his abiding
  presence. Christ, who has allowed them to share his sorrow, will also enable them to share
  in his glory, which he gained for us by his suffering and death.

- **Litany or intercessions**: A simple litany or form of general intercessions may be
developed, asking for God’s help upon this family in their time of sorrow, this parish and
civic community, our nation, and upon the world and the Church. As a response, Job’s
words (1:21) may be used: **Blessed be the name of the Lord.** The litany or intercessions
may conclude with the Lord’s prayer, sung if possible.

- **Blessing**: The priest gives his blessing to the parents, family and friends in these
  or similar words:

  *Priest*  May God, the Father of all consolation,
  be with you in your sorrow,
  and give you his light and his peace.

  *All*  Amen!

  *Priest*  May Jesus Christ his Son,
  who suffered and died for us all,
  raise you from sorrow and grief.

  *All*  Amen!
Priest       May the Holy Spirit be with you,
to grant you encouragement in your lives,
and strength to accept the will of God.

All          Amen!

Priest       And may our all-merciful God
— Father, Son † and Holy Spirit —
bless us all and keep us in his love for ever.

All          Amen!

The service may end with a hymn or psalm.

BLESSING OF AN ELDERLY PERSON

The consolation of prayer and of God's blessing is appreciated by an older person.
This blessing may be celebrated by a friend or member of the family during a visit with
an older person, or among a gathering of pensioners, golden age clubs, or with people in
a home for the aged.

Elements that may be used in this celebration:

- A familiar hymn may begin a service for a large group.
- Readings: Deut. 10:12-15; Rom. 5:6-11; Rom. 8:14-17; 2 Cor. 1:3-7; Eph. 1:3-10;
  Phil. 2:1-4, or 1-11; 1 Jn. 3:1-3.
- Psalm: selected verses from Ps. 71 or Ps. 139; Ps. 1; Ps. 23; Ps. 77; Ps. 111; Ps. 112;
  Ps. 113.
- Gospel text: Mt. 5:1-10, or 1-12; Mt. 6:6-15; Lk. 2:22-40.
- In a larger gathering, the leader may say a few words on the readings. In an
  individual blessing, the visitor may wish to talk about the reading with the person he is
  blessing.
- Prayer:

  Leader       Father in heaven,
               remember those who love you
               and who have grown old in your service.
               Bless † N., and give him (her) strength and courage
               to follow your Son Jesus each day.

               We ask this blessing
               through Christ our Lord.

               Another form:

               Lord Jesus,
               bless † N., and keep him (her) in your love.
               Give him (her) your joy and peace each day.

               Lord Jesus, hear our prayer.

               Imposition of hands: The person who gives the blessing may lay his hands upon
               the elderly person's head during or after the prayer.

*     *     *

As well as praying for the sick, it is good to pray with a sick or elderly person during
a visit, if the patient so wishes. To read a gospel passage, to say a decade of the rosary,
to share a moment of silent prayer: these are ways of praying with the Lord in his suffering
members.
BLESSING FOR TRAVELLERS

This prayer may be used at the beginning of any journey, to ask God's blessing and protection for any individual or group. This blessing is particularly appropriate for pilgrims, but may also be used when people are moving away from the parish, or are going on a vacation trip. It may be given by a priest, deacon or lay person. The persons who are travelling and those who are sending them off take part in the rite.

The priest or leader gives a brief introduction, and calls the group to prayer. If the setting permits, those who are travelling may remain in the center of the assembly.

Opening prayer:

Leader Our help is in the name of the Lord.
All Who made heaven and earth.
Leader The Lord be with you.
All And also with you.
Leader Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation:
through your goodness we have this opportunity to travel and to meet new experiences along the way.
May we praise your name
as you lead us by your light and your wisdom,
and guide us along your way.
All Blessed be God for ever.

Prayer for the travellers: The litany and its response may be sung.²

Leader Let us ask God's blessing
on those who are travelling and on all of us.
In peace, let us pray to the Lord.
All Lord, have mercy.
Leader For a blessing of peace
on all who are gathered here,
let us pray to the Lord. R.
For a blessing of peace and protection
on all who are travelling today,
let us pray to the Lord. R.
For the blessing of forgiveness of our sins
as we begin this journey,
let us pray to the Lord. R.
Again we pray for mercy, life, openness,
health, salvation, and protection from all danger,
let us pray to the Lord. R.
For an angel of peace
to be a faithful guide and guardian of our steps,
let us pray to the Lord. R.

¹ Contributed by Rev. Donald Lizzotti, of St. Michael's Church, Dunnville, Ontario.
² Music for this form of litany, from the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, is given in Morning Praise and Evensong. Fides Publishers, Notre Dame, Indiana, page 11. (This book was reviewed in Bulletin 40, pages 213-214.)
That our friends may arrive safely at their destination and return home in health and happiness, let us pray to the Lord.

That this whole day may be spent in peace, let us pray to the Lord.

Now, let us remember Mary, the virgin mother of God and our mother, with St. N. and all the saints, and commend ourselves and one another to Christ, our Lord and God.

All To you, O Lord.

**Liturgy of the word:** One or two passages of scripture may be read with the usual introductions and conclusions. A psalm or hymn may be sung between the two readings, or after the reading if only one is used (such as The Lord is my shepherd, *CBW*, nos. 227, 228, 401 or 402).

- **Readings:**

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<tr>
<th>Lectionary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Is. 41:8-10, 13-14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mt. 2:13-15, 19-23</td>
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<td>Lk. 10:25-37</td>
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<td>Jn. 17:11b, 17-23</td>
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<td>Acts 1:3-8</td>
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- **Other texts:**

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<td>Gen. 28:10-12</td>
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<td>Mt. 10:713</td>
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<td>Lk. 1:39-56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lk. 3:1-6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Cor. 9:19-27</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- **Invocation of saints:** Special patrons may be added to this brief litany. The group may prefer to sing the full litany of the saints (see *CBW*, pew edition, pages 66-68).

**Leader** Our Lady of the way, Our Lady, help of pilgrims, St. Peter and St. Paul, St. Francis Xavier, St. Joseph Cupertino, St. Jean de Brébeuf and St. Isaac Jogues, St. Frances of Rome, St. Martin de Porres, Other patrons may be added.

All you holy saints of God.

**Blessing:**

Leader Pray in silence that God will bless and protect our travellers.

All pause for silent prayer. During this, the travellers may kneel.

Leader Blessed is our God at all times, now and always and for ever.

All Amen!
The priest or leader then prays over the travellers. He may choose to extend his hands over them as he prays. If a time for spontaneous prayer is provided, he may invite others to extend their hands with him.

Leader  May the Lord watch over you
         and bless you as you travel.
         May our Lady Mary protect you on your way,
         that no harm may come to you,
         nor any misfortune keep you from reaching your destination.
         May God bring you in peace to your place in the kingdom,
         where he is living and reigning for ever and ever.

All  Amen!

* For a pilgrimage:

Leader  May the Lord bless you and lead you in this pilgrimage.
         May our Lady Mary watch over you and protect you,
         that your prayer and fasting along the way
         may prepare you for the blessings and joys of the holy places.
         May you be kept safe from all harm,
         that you may praise God now
         from the fullness of your heart,
         and for ever in the kingdom of light, happiness and peace.
         We ask this grace through Christ our Lord.

All  Amen!

If a group banner or a pilgrim cross is to be blessed, the prayer given in no. 30 may be used.

Final blessing and dismissal:

Leader  May the Lord Jesus Christ be with you
         to protect you on your way.

All  Amen!

Leader  May he go before you to guide you,
         and stand behind you to give you strength.

All  Amen!

Leader  May he look upon you
         to bless you and keep you in his love.

All  Amen!

Leader  May almighty God
         — the Father, Son and Holy Spirit —
         bless you abundantly and for ever.

All  Amen!

The leader of the pilgrimage says to the pilgrims:

Let us go forth in peace.

Pilgrims  In the name of the Lord.

As the pilgrims go out in procession, the entire assembly sings This day God gives me,

* * *

Other prayers for travellers have been printed in past issues: see Bulletin 34, page 121, and Bulletin 40, page 215; see also blessing no. 5, above.
BLESSING OF THROATS

Many ideas for preparing this celebration are given in Bulletin 36, pages 277-279. These may be developed for family use; a berakah may also be incorporated.

BLESSING PLACES

God is everywhere, present in all creation by his power and providential care. As Psalm 139 recalls, there is nowhere on earth we can go to hide from God: he sees us, knows us, reaches out and helps us wherever we are. All creation is his.

People define places by their relationship to them. A house becomes a home, a little church, the place where children first learn their faith, a place of love. A school building becomes our alma mater, a place of learning, a place where students, teachers, parents and administrators act and work together. A hospital becomes a place of healing and solace, where some members of the community exercise their God-given talents for the benefit of the sick and injured, and where others visit in the spirit of Christian love.

When we bless a place, we are praising God for the people who act in this space, and asking him to bless them and what they do here.

In the prayers and outlines presented here, your community will find models and ideas for blessing places and the people who live and work and play in them. Such blessings can be one of the ways in which Christ leads us gradually along his pathways, until he restores the kingdom to the Father, and God is all in all. Similar blessings may be developed for other places.

The blessings of places given below include:

20. Blessing of a home
21. Blessing of a school
22. Blessing of a hospital
23. Blessing of a place or area

BLESSING OF A HOME

A pastoral opportunity: Any ritual blessing can provide an occasion of spiritual growth and renewal. The blessing of a house is not the blessing of a building only, but primarily a time of prayer for the people who live in it and make it a home: it is an invitation for them to praise God for his many blessings to their family, and a moment for calling down his loving kindness upon them.

An effective celebration requires adequate preparation of the members of the family, a time for scripture reading, reflection and prayer together. It provides a call to even greater faithfulness to the way of God and the voice of his Spirit; it is an occasion of grace for all. The priest's visit, along with the time of preparation for the celebration, may provide an opportunity for renewal, or for sacramental reconciliation with the parish community after a period of indifference or carelessness.

In smaller parishes, the blessing may be celebrated during the pastor's yearly visit to the home. In larger parishes, members of the liturgy committee or other ministers may celebrate the blessing in the name of the priests and the parish, reflecting the family's
membership in the local community of prayer. This blessing should be one further way of involving each family in the spiritual life of the parish.

Family preparations and prayers, perhaps outlined in a mimeographed leaflet or in a bulletin insert, would be made in advance of the visit; preliminary arrangements and preparation of prayers and readings might be done with the cooperation of a liturgy committee member. Each family, working with their priest, may develop the blessing to meet their needs and to lead them forward in the Lord’s service. The priest helps them to realize that when we ask God to bless a home, we must also be involved in the work of helping the homeless throughout the world.

Two distinct celebrations and a simple prayer of blessing for family use on New Year’s day are presented here for local adaptation and development.

First Form of Blessing

Wherever possible, many relatives and friends should be invited for this celebration.1 If circumstances require, the rite may be abbreviated. It should, however, always have the note of a special event taking place in the family. The attitude, care in preparation, and tone of celebration of the priest or leader will make a great difference in the meaning of the rite.

Opening rite: The priest or leader begins with a brief explanation of the celebration, and invites all to take a full and active part.

- Hymn: The tone of the celebration may be set by singing a hymn:

  Bless the Lord I was full of joy Prayer of St. Francis Ps. 118

  CBW, no. 340 323 404 nos. 180-181; pew, pages 65, 70-71

Leader Peace † to this house

All And to all who live here.

- Prayer

  Priest Blessed are you, Lord God, king of all creation:
  through your goodness you have given this house to be a home for your children, the N. family.
  Let your peace remain here always, and may their generous hospitality be extended to all who enter and share the life of this home.

  All Blessed be God for ever!

- Blessing of water: The priest blesses water:

  Priest Lord, may this water, blessed † in your name, be a sign of your protection upon all who live here, and upon their home and all things within it.
  May they be protected from every harm or sickness, and may your peace and happiness remain here always.

  We ask this blessing through Christ our Lord.

  All Amen!

1 Based on blessings contributed by Rev. Donald Lizzotti, of St. Michael’s Church, Dunnville, Ontario, and by Rev. John Knight, of Welland, Ontario, secretary of the Central Liturgical Conference.
He sprinkles the people present with the blessed water, in remembrance of their baptism; he may sprinkle all the rooms of the house as a sign of dedication and cleansing. While he is doing this, or after, all may sing or recite a psalm.

- **Psalm:** One of the following may be sung:
  
  Ps. 51 (50)  
  Ps. 118 (during the Easter season)  
  or another psalm familiar to the family.

- **Incense** may be used. The priest explains that it is a sign of our prayers rising to God, and of the dedication of this home to his praise and glory. The living room or principal room is incensed, and also the book of the word before the readings.

  **Liturgy of the word**
  
  - **Scripture readings:** One or more readings may be proclaimed by members of the family:

    | Lectionary |
    |-----------|
    | Gen. 18:1-8 | see no. 376 I |
    | Rom. 12:9-16 | 867 (1) |
    | Mt. 10:1, 5-16 | 109 |
    | Lk. 10:38-42 | |

- **Homily:** The priest may give an informal homily. A hymn may follow.

  **Rite of blessing**
  
  **Priest** Blessed are you, Lord God, ruler of all the universe:  
  we thank you for your loving care of all your creation.  
  Send your angel from heaven  
  to guard and guide all who live in this home.  
  and to give them joy and encouragement in your service.  
  Father, hear our prayer,  
  which we offer through Christ our Lord.

  **All** Amen!

  or (see Gal. 5:22-24):

  **Priest** Loving Father,  
  send your Spirit into the hearts of this family.  
  Let them be filled with his love, joy and peace.  
  May he help them to be patient, kind and good,  
  faithful, humble and self-controlled.  
  Let them always belong to Jesus Christ,  
  for he is our Lord and savior, now and for ever.

  **All** Amen!

  **Closing prayers**
  
  **Priest** Now let us pray together  
  as our Lord has taught us to pray:  
  Our Father . . .

  - **Solemn blessing:** The priest may give one of the seasonal solemn blessings from the sacramentary (pages 625-635), or use one prepared by the family, or say:

    **Priest** May the Father love you,  
    and come to you and live with you.

    **All** Amen!
Priest  May the Son of God stay with you,
        and give you his peace.  
        Lk. 24:29
        Jn. 14:27
All        Amen!

Priest  May the Spirit of God teach you all things
        and stay with you for ever.  
        Jn. 14:26
        Jn. 14:16
All        Amen!

Priest  And may almighty God,
        Father, Son, † and Holy Spirit,
        bless you and keep you in his love for ever.  
All        Amen!

Second Form of Blessing

This form provides other options which may be incorporated in the blessing of a home.

Opening rite

• Welcome: The blessing is celebrated at a time when the whole family can be together. As the priest is welcomed at the door, the father says, in these or similar words:

Father  Welcome to our home in the name of the Lord.

Family  Praised be God for ever!

Priest  Peace to this house.  
        Mt. 10:12

Family  And to all who live here.

• Hymn: In some homes, it may be desirable to sing a psalm or hymn at this point, or to celebrate one of the hours from the liturgy of the hours, or to pray a decade of the rosary.

• Prayer: The priest concludes with this prayer:

Priest  Let us pray to God for his blessing.

        All pause for silent prayer.

Father in heaven,
look upon this family in your love,
and give them the blessing of your peace.
Let your Spirit of joy fill their hearts,
so that they may be holy and happy.
May their concern for others reflect your love,
and bring them happiness throughout this year.

We offer all praise to you, Father,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Family  Amen!

Liturgy of the word: In the readings, God speaks to his people, and tells them how they are to live in his service. The texts should be read by members of the family, if possible, and from the family bible.

• First reading: Num. 6:22-27; 1 Cor. 12:4-12; 1 Cor. 13:1-7 or 4-7; 2 Cor. 6:1-2; Gal. 1:3-5; Eph. 1:3-10; Eph. 1:11-20 or 11-23; Eph. 3:14-21; selected verses from Eph. 5 and 6; Phil. 2:1-11 or 12-16; Phil. 4:4-9; Col. 1:9-14; selected verses from Col. 3 and 4; 1 Jn. 4:4-12 or 13-21.
• **Response:** A psalm, a simple responsory, silent reflection, a hymn or another form of response may be made to God's word.

• **Gospel reading:** Mt. 5:1-12 or 13-16; Mt. 10:11-15; Mt. 12:18-21; Mt. 18:1-5 or 19-22; Jn. 14:15-27; Jn. 15:1-17.

• **Homily or reflections:** In an informal way, the priest explains the word of God, and leads them to praise him for his wonderful love. God hears the prayers of those who do his will.

**Blessing**

• **Water:** If holy water is to be used, the priest blesses it in a container:

  Father,
  bless this water,
  and let it be a reminder for us of our baptism.
  Help us to live as people of light,
  and to be blameless and worthy in your sight.

  All honor and praise be yours, Father,
  through Christ our Lord and savior.

*Family*  
Amen!

• **Blessing of the home:**

  Blessed are you, Lord God, king of the universe:  
  you have shared your life and grace with this family.  
  In your mercy,  
  bless them, and bless their home.  
  May they be people of prayer,  
  and their home a place of prayer and peace.  
  Let them live in your love,  
  and be generous in their love and service for other people.  
  May the faith of Mary and Joseph and all your saints  
  inspire them to follow the example of your Son Jesus,  
  who is our Lord and savior for ever and ever.

*Family*  
Amen!

If possible, this response may be sung: see CBW, nos. 216-220.

Accompanied by a member of the family or by the whole group, the priest goes to each room and sprinkles it with the blessed water. During this all may sing a psalm or hymn. After the blessing, the container of water is kept for use by the family in times of prayer.

• **Intercessions or litany:** Members of the family may prepare a prayer of the faithful or litany, praying for themselves and others, for the needs of the Church and the world. (If desired, petitions applicable to various rooms may be included here or during the sprinkling.) This prayer concludes with the Lord's prayer, sung if possible.

**Closing rite**

• **Blessing:** The celebrant may give a seasonal solemn blessing (see sacramentary, pages 625-635), or prepare his own in these or similar words:

  *Priest*  
  May God the Father, who created you,  
  pour his blessings upon you.

  *Family*  
  Amen!

---

2 For example, the prayers and antiphons of night prayer in the liturgy of the hours provide a source of petitions for use in bedrooms; the blessing of food (see blessing no. 24) offers ideas for kitchen and dining room.
Priest: May God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, bless you and keep you in his love.

Family: Amen!

Priest: May God the Holy Spirit, who lives within you, continue to bless you and guide you.

Family: Amen!

Priest: May our all-powerful and loving God — Father, Son † and Holy Spirit — bless you in his love, and bring you into everlasting life.

Family: Amen!

After a gesture of peace and a hymn, the celebration may end with refreshments or a meal.

* * *

If Mass is to be celebrated in the home on the occasion of the blessing, it would be correct to give the blessing after the homily; only a brief form of the blessing need be used, since the liturgy of the word will provide the readings and other elements of the usual blessing service.

A New Year's Blessing

A simple form for use at home on the first day of the year. It may be celebrated at a meal. This blessing may also be adapted and used by the family on their first day in a new home.

- **Sign of the cross**, following by a greeting of peace:
  
  **Father:** May God grant us his peace.
  
  **Family:** And keep us in his love.


- **Psalm:** A psalm may be sung or recited: Ps. 113; Ps. 1; Ps. 80; Ps. 23; Ps. 24; Ps. 27; Ps. 30.

- **Gospel:** Mt. 6:24-34; Mt. 24:36-44 or 45-51; Lk. 12:35-40; Jn. 2:23-25; Jn. 12:44-50.

- All may pause to reflect on the blessings of the Lord during the past year; if desired, they could praise God for these blessings in the style of Ps. 136.

- A brief prayer of the faithful may express the intercessions of the family for themselves, their relatives and friends, their parish and civic community, for the Church and the nation, and for peace throughout the world.

- **Blessing:** given by the father or mother in the name of the entire family:

  All praise to you, Lord God, king of the universe: you have brought us to the beginning of a new year. Bless † us and all we do in your service, so that we may work for your honor and glory, and for the salvation of your people. Let us grow to maturity in Christ throughout this year.

  Father, we ask your blessing through Christ our Lord.

*Family:* Amen!
Another prayer may be developed from the sacramentary (no. 531, page 992). See also Bulletin 36, pages 267-271, and Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy, for January 1.

A hymn or psalm may be sung:

**O God, our help in ages past**

Ps. 117

This day God gives me

In its simplest form, this blessing could consist of a reading, blessing, Lord's prayer and a hymn.

**BLESSING OF A SCHOOL**

The blessing of a school is far more than a prayer for a building: it is the dedication of the efforts of students and teachers, a prayer for their contribution to the community and to human race. It is a prayer for these members of the people of God, and for what they can do for the development of his kingdom. In the blessing of a school, we pray not only for the present generation of students and teachers, but also for the future generations, and for all whom they will influence.

**Preparation:** The ceremony of blessing a school — a new building, an additional wing, renovated facilities — involves many groups in the community: students and parents, teachers and board members, other school employees, civic government at all levels, the parish church or churches and the diocese, and all the organizations to which people of these groupings belong. The preparations and celebration will depend somewhat on the type of school involved, whether elementary, secondary or technical school, or university.

A planning group drawing on the resources and talents of various parts of the community can help to prepare the celebration. According to local circumstances, is it better to have the religious and civil ceremonies separated, or together but distinct, or all in one celebration?

**Elements of the blessing:** Some of the elements of the blessing which should be discussed and prepared are:

- **Singing:** Hymns, psalms, music: Does the school song fit this type of celebration? Where does the national anthem fit in?

- **Prayer:** Vocal prayer and time for silent prayer are both important. There should be a place in the celebration for at least one prayer to be sung or said by all together.

- **Scripture reading:** A minimum of one well chosen selection from God's word is needed. How can this be selected? How will it be proclaimed?

- **Reflection:** Good liturgy demands time for reflection and prayer as a result of the readings and the nature of the event being celebrated. How can this be best achieved under the circumstances? Will a talk be better than silent prayer? It would seem desirable to separate political and spiritual considerations at this point.

- **Petitions:** Some form of prayer is needed in which the community prays for various concerns related to this school, and for broader needs. Is the format of the general intercessions (prayer of the faithful) or of a litany better here? Should some other prayer form be used? How can community involvement be deepened in the preparation and celebration of this part of the ceremony?

- **Blessing:** The basic elements of the blessing are normally three: praise and thanks to God, a prayer for his blessing upon this institution, and especially a request for his blessing on his children who are involved in it. Who will prepare the blessing? Who will give it? With what gestures and ceremonies?
• Closing: How will the liturgical celebration end? How will it fit into the civic ceremony, if this is also taking place? What elements are most useful and desirable to conclude the celebration well?

Parish School

An example of a blessing which may be given at the opening of a parish school: It should be adapted to local needs and circumstances.

Pastor  Let us ask God to bless us.

All pause for a moment of silent prayer.

All praise to you, heavenly Father,
Lord of all creation:
you have gathered us in this parish community
to praise you by our words and works.
Bless this school which we have built
for the education of our young people.
Bless our students and teachers,
our parents, board members, employees,
and all who work to promote sound education in our community.

May our youth grow in wisdom, age and grace
before you and before all men.
May this school always be a home of truth and wisdom,
of faith and good will toward all.
Through the prayers of St. (patron of school),
may this school help our community,
and work to build your kingdom of justice, light and peace.

Loving Father,
listen to our prayer,
which we offer through Christ our Lord,
in your Holy Spirit:
all glory to you, one God, for ever and ever.

All  Amen!

The acclamation may be sung: CBW, nos. 216-220.

Teachers' College

An example of a prayer used for blessing a teachers' college is given here.1 In the original celebration, the prayer was said both in English and in French.


Esprit-Saint, viens dans nos cœurs,
viens habiter en nous et inspire nos prières;
daigne combler de ta grâce tous nos frères et sœurs
que tu visites en ce jour de joie et d'espérance.

Prions le Seigneur:

Prière en silence.

Seigneur notre Dieu, maître souverain et Père de tous,
tu as accordé aux hommes

---

la connaissance de ton amour inépuisable
et de ta parfaite sagesse,
grâce à ton Fils, Jésus-Christ,

Accepte l'hommage de notre gratitude et de nos louanges
pour le goût de la recherche et de la vérité
inscrit dans nos cœurs,
pour les aspirations d'humanisme et de fraternité
répandues au sein de ce peuple qui t'implore;

Daigne bénir † cette maison d'enseignement
et de formation pédagogique,
édifiée sous ton regard bienveillant
et promise à l'accueil d'étudiants et de maîtres
confiants en l'avenir;

Accorde à tous ta constante protection
et la joie de ta † bénédiction
afin que, grâce à toi,
ils puissent ardemment rechercher toute vraie science qui humanise,
et développer des liens de communauté et d'amitié
qui nous unissent en l'Esprit-Saint,
par Jésus, le Christ, notre Seigneur.

Tous: Amen!

* * *

Parish liturgical committees might discuss with parish schools the possibility of having a day or ceremony or Mass of rededication at the beginning of each school year.

BLESSING OF A HOSPITAL

During the years of his ministry, Jesus showed his compassion for the sick on many occasions. He sent his apostles to lay hands on them and anoint them with healing oil (Mk. 6:13). The Lord Jesus also reminded us, in speaking of the day of judgment, that we visit him when we visit the sick, and reject him when we refuse to come to their aid (Mt. 25:31-46).

Through the centuries, the Christian people have shown their love for the sick by founding many institutions for them, and by many religious orders devoted to their care.

Since the Vatican Council, the Church has renewed the sacrament of the sick. The recently issued ritual, Pastoral Care of the Sick and the Rite of Anointing, provides enriched rites for the sick. It also discusses the place of sickness in the mystery of salvation (rite, nos. 1-4), and the responsibility of the entire Christian community for the sick in their midst (rite, nos. 32-35).

Today, a hospital is part of the community's concern for the health and well-being of its people. The blessing of a new hospital or of a new medical facility provides an opportunity for all to recall its role and their personal responsibility toward the sick.

- Preparations: Since the opening of a hospital or of a new wing will normally be marked by a civic celebration, the blessing will usually be a part of it. As noted for the blessing of a school (no. 21), cooperation in planning will lead to a successful celebration.

- Some of the elements which may be used, according to local circumstances are readings, hymns, psalms, prayers, general intercessions or litany (see blessing no. 15 or no. 18 for an example which may be adapted).
A prayer of blessing may be developed to suit the specific situation. One example of this:

Nous te louons, Seigneur notre Dieu,
Dieu d’Abraham, d’Isaac, de Jacob,
Père de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ
et en lui notre Père à tous !

We praise you, God of our fathers,
you are the ever-living God,
the fountain of all life,
the Lord and lover of life,
the gentle Father and the God of all consolation,
who comfort us in all sorrows.

Nous te rendons grâces, Seigneur Jésus,
pour l’amour infini
avec lequel tu as pris sur toi toutes nos infirmités,
afin que les malades, les parclus, les impotents trouvent soulagement et compassion.

We thank you, Lord and brother, Jesus Christ,
for the love which you lavished
upon all your wounded brethren,
and shared so admirably
with the Sisters of Charity,
whom you sent here to our diocese 150 years ago.

Nous te prions, Esprit Saint,
d’inspirer du même souci
et de remplir de la même charité
tous ceux qui poursuivent cette œuvre en ces lieux:
puissent-ils, par leurs soins attentifs et leur dévouement,
visiter, prendre grand soin, fortifier, encourager
leurs frères et sœurs qu’on amène en ces lieux.

We beg of you, Holy Spirit,
to bless through our humble ministry
all who come here to be taken care of,
and all who care for them;
and to fill with your presence these new premises,
that they may be an abode of peace and love.2

In nomine Patris, et † Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.

Amen !

---

1 Prayer and blessing, given by Most Rev. Maurice Baudoux, former Archbishop of St. Boniface, Manitoba, at the official opening of new services, St. Boniface General Hospital, October 7, 1974. Used with permission.

2 See Exod. 3:4; Num. 14:21; 2 Macc. 7:36; Ps. 35:10; Ps. 41:4; Wis. 11:26; Sir. 23:4; Sir. 7:39; Is. 53:4; Jer. 10:10; Ezek. 17:28; Dan. 6:27; Mt. 9:12; Mt. 22:32; Mt. 25:36; Acts 7:32; 2 Cor. 1:3; Mt. 8:17.
BLESSING OF A PLACE OR AREA

A blessing may be given to areas such as parks or playgrounds, and to buildings of various types. Especially when this blessing is part of a civic dedication ceremony, those who prepare the blessing could choose a small group to develop it; this service will normally be ecumenical in its approach.

The group preparing the blessing should consider the role of the new area or building in the life of the community, and how it may help to make this a better world for God's people; these ideas may form part of the blessing.

In a civic ceremony, one prayer of blessing or dedication will normally suffice. In Canada, it is usually appropriate to use both French and English. If a fuller ceremony is desired, it could consist of:

- A hymn, such as O God, our help (see CBW, no. 391).
- A brief reading from scripture, appropriate for the occasion or place.
- Sometimes a short reflection (homily) may be given.
- A prayer — litany or general intercessions — for the community.
- Blessing or dedication.
- Closing hymn or psalm, possibly at the end of the civic service.

BLESSING THINGS

Man shares in the creative power and work of God. By using created things well, men and women are working with Christ to bring creation to its fulfillment within God's plan. By using the things of this world with reverence, we are able to praise and serve God.

Sin brings disharmony and disunity into the world. Man's obedience to God, his efforts to use things well are steps toward reconciling man with nature, and restoring the beauty and harmony of creation.

The Church blesses both animate and inanimate things, dedicating them to the use of God's people. Animals, plants and objects are blessed, and with them the people who work with these things and use them. By right use of creation, man is working along with God's plan, thus helping to restore all things in Christ.

The blessings and suggestions that follow will provide ideas for members of your believing community to use in the service of God and neighbor.

Blessings of things: These prayers are included below. They may be used as given, or the local church may develop them further.

24. Blessing of food
25. Blessing of animals
26. Blessing of seed
27. Blessing of crops
28. Blessing of a vehicle
29. Blessing of fishing boats
30. Blessing of a banner
31. General blessing of any object
32. Blessing of articles of devotion
Several forms are suggested, according to circumstances. The blessing may be used as a form of grace, or as part of a more extended celebration. As we prepare food for our own use, we should never forget that Christ in others is hungry, and seeks our help (see Mt. 25:31-46).

a) Feast day: Food may be blessed in preparation for a feast day, or at the table. The prayer given here is for Easter Sunday, but may be adapted for other feasts. (The liturgy committee may wish to design a simple blessing that families could use every Sunday.)

- Gospel reading: The gospel text for this Sunday or feast is used.
- Prayer of blessing: The father or mother, or another person, says the prayer, while all stand in silence.

Leader

Let us ask God to bless us and this food as we celebrate the resurrection of his Son.

All pause for silent prayer.

Leader

Blessed are you, Lord God, king of the universe: you raised your beloved Son from the dead, and made him Lord of all.

We turn to you in prayer, and ask you to bless us and this food you have given us.

Help us to be generous toward others, and to work with them so that they too may eat well.

Father of heaven, may we all celebrate together around your table in heaven.

We praise you and give you glory through Christ our Lord.

Family

Amen!

b) Fast day: On a day of penance and fasting, the Church of God turns to him in more fervent prayer. Suggestions for a blessing of food on such a day are given here, and may be developed according to local circumstances.

- Scripture reading: Mt. 6:1-4, 16-18; Mt. 6:19-21; Mt. 6:24-34; Mt. 9:14-15; Mt. 25:31-46; Lk. 12:32-34; Lk. 12:35-41. If two readings are used, the first may be Is. 58:1-9a, or 7-10, or 9b-14, or 1-14.
- Psalm: A penitential psalm may be sung or said (see Bulletin 48, pages 103-107).
- Alms: While the meal is being planned and prepared, definite efforts are made to cut down on amounts and variety, so that the money saved (in comparison to an ordinary meal) may be given to the poor and needy. This money may be dedicated at this meal in a simple berakah. Concern for others in need may also be expressed by inviting someone — a pensioner, an elderly person of limited means, a convalescing neighbor — to share in this meal, or by bringing a substantial meal (a good piece of meat, a special dessert) to such a person.
- Blessing:

Leader

Bless this food, heavenly Father, which you have given us in your mercy: may it bring us strength to work in your service.

Bless these alms which we share with others, and bless us in your love.

Forgive us our sins, and lead all men back to you.

We offer you our prayer and our penance through Christ, our savior and our Lord.

Family

Amen!
c) Friday: On Friday, the Church of God continues the tradition of voluntary penance in union with the suffering of the Lord Jesus (see Bulletin 42, pages 18-19; and 1975 Guidelines, note 25, pages 43-44). Alms may be set aside or the meal shared with others, as described above for times of fasting.

- A short reading from one of the passion narratives, describing the crucifixion and death of Jesus. It would be good to have a crucifix in the room where the meal is being eaten.

- Psalm: If desired, a section of Ps. 119 may be read; in Lent, some verses of Ps. 22 may be preferred. The antiphon may be sung: CBW, nos. 179, 227-228, and pew edition, page 49.

- Blessing of the food:

  
  **Leader** Heavenly Father,
  
  we praise you for having saved us through the suffering and death of your Son.
  
  Forgive us our sins, and lead us to greater dedication:
  
  teach us to be obedient in faith,
  
  always ready to serve you by serving others in love.

  Bless this food, and make us truly grateful for all the gifts you have shared with us through Christ our Lord.

  
  **Family** Amen!

- Acclamation: All may sing a memorial acclamation: Christ has died, Dying you destroyed our death, or Lord, by your cross (CBW, nos. 211-214).

d) Other times: Any family meal or meal among friends can be a reminder of our brotherhood in Christ, who often described the kingdom of heaven as a banquet prepared by his Father. These meals can also remind us of the eucharistic banquet celebrated each week in our community on the Lord’s day.

- Scripture: If desired, one of the many accounts of a meal may be read from the word of God. A few brief reflections or quiet discussion may follow spontaneously during the meal, but need not be organized.

- Psalm: A psalm (such as Ps. 23 or selections from Ps. 104) may be sung or said.

- Blessing: The text may be adapted according to the nature of the gathering, the season of the year, and other circumstances:

  **Leader** Loving Father,
  
  we thank you for gathering us together for this meal: may we continue to live in your friendship and in harmony with one another.

  Bless this food, a sign of your loving care for us, and bless us in our daily lives.

  Bless your Church throughout the world, and all those who seek to do your will today.

  Father of mercy, all praise to you through Jesus Christ our Savior, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

  **All** Amen!

e) Grace after meals: How often do we express our thanks to God at the end of our meals? Each family may wish to develop special forms for Sundays, Fridays, and fast days. Two general forms which may provide a starting point for these are given here:
Leader  Father of mercy,  
we praise you and give you glory  
for the wonderful gifts you have given us:  
for life and health, for faith and love,  
and for this meal we have shared together.  
Father, we thank you through Christ our Lord.

Family  Amen!

Leader  or:

Leader  Blessed are you, Lord God,  
ruler of the universe:  
you provide us with food and drink  
because you love us.  
We thank you for your blessings,  
and ask your help to live this day in your grace.  
Blessed is God for ever.

Family  And blessed is his holy name.  Amen!

BLESSING OF ANIMALS  No. 25

God saw that all creation was good, and gave it to man for his use in God’s service  
(see Gen. 1:26-31). Even in today’s mechanised society, many people keep animals  
for food, work, companionship or recreation. Concern for the well-being of animals is a  
sign of mercy in a humane person; cruelty or neglect of animals is inhumane, and often flows  
from a disturbed personality.

This prayer of blessing may be used for working animals, for those being grown for  
food, or for pets. It may be celebrated by their owner or by a priest, and in whatever place  
is suitable or convenient. The prayer may be adapted as desired.

- A suitable reading may be proclaimed. Ps. 8 (see CBW, nos. 224, 226) may be sung.
- Prayer of blessing:

Leader  Blessed are you, Lord God, ruler of the universe:  
we praise you for the wonderful works you have made.  
Bless † this animal,  
and help us to use it in your service.  
Have mercy on your beloved people,  
and keep us blameless in your love.  
Father, we ask your blessing  
in the name of Jesus our Lord.

All  Amen!

Blessing of a sick animal: When an animal is sick or injured, a prayer of blessing  
may be offered by the owner or by the priest. This prayer may be adapted according to  
circumstances.

Leader  Heavenly Father,  
you have created all things for your glory,  
and have made us stewards of this world.  
Look with † kindness on this creature:  
if it is your will, restore it to health and strength.  
Teach us to accept and obey your will at all times.  
Blessed are you, Lord God,  
and holy is your name  
for ever and ever.

All  Amen!
BLESSING OF SEED

It has long been the Church's custom to bless the seed before it is planted, and to ask God in his mercy to grant good weather and bountiful harvests for mankind.

Prayers for good harvests: On a suitable day in spring, prayers may be offered for good harvests. These prayers, which will be of greater concern in rural parishes, are celebrated in the way considered best in each community, and may be offered on a Sunday or a weekday.

- On a weekday: The Mass for productive land (sacramentary, nos. 534-535; lectionary, nos. 851-855) may be celebrated. The homily would emphasize the goodness of our creator and Father, who supports man's life by giving him the benefits of the earth's produce; our responsibility for sharing the goods of the earth with others should not be forgotten. This could be followed by the blessing of seeds. The general intercessions should include a petition for good harvests.

This celebration could take place in church or in the open air. A bible vigil, incorporating some of these ideas and including the litany of the saints (CBW, pew edition, pages 66-68) as part of the service, could be celebrated.

- On Sunday: The general intentions would include a petition for good harvests; the blessing of seeds may take place after the homily.1

The parish liturgy committee may plan and develop an appropriate bible service, including readings (such as Cor. 9:6-15; Mk. 4:1-9, 13-20; see also lectionary, nos, 846-855). The following prayers may be adapted as desired.

Leader Eternal Father, maker of heaven and earth, we bless you and give you glory.

Bless this seed, and make it fruitful.
Look upon our work this season, and grant that the seeds we plant will produce plentiful crops, providing food and work for many. In your love, give us favorable weather throughout this growing season.

Make us truly grateful for all our gifts, and willing to share our goods and talents with others, especially those without adequate food.

All praise and glory be yours, almighty Father, through your Son Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen!

or:

Leader Almighty Father, creator of the universe, giver of life and provider of all good things: in your infinite mercy and love, bless our labors with your power. Let these seeds sprout in our fields to become nourishment for our bodies,

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1 From Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy — 1975 Liturgical Calendar, pastoral note 20, page 38.
2 Based on a prayer prepared by Rev. Joseph Sieczkarski, of Deloraine, Manitoba.
so that we may glorify you
in the abundance of your blessings.

Father, we ask this grace
through Christ our Lord.

All Amen!

Père tout-puissant,\(^1\)
créateur de l’univers,
toi qui donnes la vie et la soutiens
par toutes sortes de bonnes choses,
daigne en ta bonté infinie et ton amour
bénir nos labours avec ta puissante bénéédiction.
Fais germer les grains semés dans nos champs
pour qu’ils deviennent nourriture pour nos corps,
et que nous puissions te glorifier
dans l’abondance de tes bénédictions.

Accepte nos prières
par Jésus, le Christ, notre Seigneur.

Tous Amen!

BLESSING OF CROPS

During the growing season, the fields, orchards, or vineyards in a parish or locality may be blessed, and prayers offered for good weather and bountiful harvests. The celebration may take place in church or in the outdoors. The parish liturgy committee may design a celebration appropriate for the locality.

Elements of the celebration may include:

- Prayer for God’s help.

- Readings from scripture (see lectionary, nos. 846-855), with a responsorial psalm praising God’s goodness, providence, loving concern for mankind.

- A brief homily, based on the readings.

- Litany of the saints (see CBW, pew edition, pages 66-68); the petitions for good weather, plentiful harvests, and food for the hungry may be augmented, or included in an extended prayer of the faithful at the end of the litany, or in place of it (see Bulletin 48, pages 130-133, for an example of such a form).

- A procession of the entire congregation or community may take place during the litany, or at another part of the service. One farm, orchard or vineyard may be chosen each year to represent the parish, but the prayers would be offered for all.

- Prayers: These prayers \(^1\) may be used or adapted for this service:

**Leader**

Father,
accept our humble petitions:
protect these crops from harm, decay or drought.
In your loving kindness,
let them bring us health and strength,
and help to all in need.

We ask this grace, Father,
through Christ our Lord.

All Amen!

\(^1\) Based on prayers prepared by Rev. Joseph Sieczkarski, of Deloraine, Manitoba.
Leader  O God, our heavenly Father,
you know all our needs.
We place our hope and confidence in you,
that we may enjoy the fruits of our labors,
and that we may be inspired with generosity

to share these fruits with all our brothers and sisters
throughout the world.

We praise you for your glory, Father,
through Christ our Lord.

All  Amen!

En français: 2

Animauteur  Accepte, Seigneur, notre humble demande,
afin que les récoltes,
qui nous donneront la santé et la force,
soient protégées de tout danger,
de toute corruption ou de sécheresse.

Accepte notre prière
par Jésus, le Christ, notre Seigneur.

Tous  Amen!

ou:

Animauteur  O Dieu, notre Père,
tu connais tous nos besoins.
Nous plaçons notre espoir et notre confiance en toi,
pour que nous puissions jouir du fruit de nos labours,
et que nous soyons inspirés par la générosité
à partager ces fruits avec nos frères
à travers le monde.

Ecoute notre prière
par Jésus, le Christ, notre Seigneur.

Tous  Amen!

BLESSING OF A VEHICLE  No. 28

This blessing may be celebrated over any vehicle, such as a car, a pleasure boat, a
light plane, a snowmobile. The text given below is designed for a personal or family vehicle;
if used for a public vehicle, such as one carrying passengers, the prayers should be adapted
to reflect these circumstances.

A family may celebrate this blessing. In a public ceremony, it is better to have the
priest or another official representative of the believing community act as the leader.

The people involved with the vehicle — the family; those who built or repaired or
restored it; those who will be using it for work or recreation — may gather around it for
the service of blessing. In a community celebration, part of the rite may take place in church,
and the actual blessing at the place where the vehicle is. If many vehicles are being blessed
in the same ceremony, the service could conclude in the church, and then the prayer of
blessing would be said over such individual vehicle and its occupants.

In a family celebration, a simple prayer of blessing may be used; some elements of the
broader celebration may be added. A community service may be developed along the lines
suggested below.

2 Based on prayers prepared by Rev. Joseph Sieczkarski, of Deloraine, Manitoba.
- A psalm or hymn to begin the celebration.
- An opening prayer.
- A reading from scripture. Care should be given to the choice of texts: readings about chariots may appear strange to modern ears. In the blessing of a boat, the gospel text of the storm at sea (Mk. 6:45-52) may be appropriate. The beatitudes (Mt. 5:1-12) describe the attitude of a Christian driver, as do some of Paul’s passages on our relationships with others. If two readings are proclaimed, Ps. 139 may be used after the first lesson; and the second passage is chosen from the gospel.
- Homily: Some reflections on the meaning of the scriptural passage for our life today, particularly in the Christian use of the vehicles being blessed.
- Pledge: A simple pledge (perhaps one to three sentences), using scriptural phrases if possible, may be developed by the liturgy committee. This should be distributed to all involved in the celebration, and is to be seen as their commitment to the courteous, safe and concerned use of their vehicle in the community.
- A simple litany or prayer of the faithful would pray for all involved in the use of this vehicle; broader concerns of the world and the Church and this community would also be mentioned. The people’s response may be sung.
- Prayer of blessing (below): This should be adapted according to the nature of the vehicle and type of celebration.
- Closing: All sing the Lord’s prayer: CBW, nos. 221-223. Then the leader says a simple blessing over all (“May almighty God bless us all...”) and the celebration ends with a hymn.

  • A procession, with banners, flags, musicians, singers, may involve all the members of the congregation, either at the beginning or end of the service, or in going from the church to the place where the vehicles are.

Prayer of blessing:

**Leader**

Praise to you, Lord God, king of the universe:
you have made all creation through your Son,
and through him, you sustain it in your care.

Grant your blessing † upon this N.,
and bless † those who use it.

Let them not abuse, harm or destroy your creation,
or use this vehicle to disturb or hurt other people.

May they use it for your honor and glory,
for the benefit and service of others,
and to build up your holy Church.

Father, listen to our prayer,
for we offer it through Christ our Lord.

**All**

Amen!

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**AN ERROR**

Please correct the inside front cover of your copy of Bulletin 48: the prices should be the same as this issue: $1.50 a copy ($1.75 outside Canada, because of postage rates).
BLESSING OF FISHING BOATS

In many fishing villages, the parish family comes together annually to ask God the Father's blessing and protection upon fishermen and their families.¹ The beginning of the season is also the occasion for blessing the fishing boats or fleet. Throughout the ages, communities have depended upon the sea and the harvest it yielded to provide their livelihood and survival. As a result, an awareness of God's design in the day-by-day activity has evolved and remains alive. Fisherfolk have a deep sensitivity to the meaning of a bountiful harvest as well as to the hazards encountered as they put out to sea in their boats. This closeness to nature and its creative life have brought together families, friends and neighbors to bless the Lord for the sea and the fish which live therein. Further, the act of begging God's protection and asking for a rich harvest has a deep significance.

Those who put out to sea stand in a long tradition. "He's a good fisherman" is a sign of recognition that a man stands in high regard among his equals. Points in this tradition that may be developed are:

- The rhythms of the season are known (e.g., spring and its importance).
- The bountiful areas of the sea are identified.
- The meaning of darkness, dawn and light are significant (e.g., at 4:00 a.m., the day begins).
- Professional skills involved in preparations for the season, as well as throughout the season, are of high quality (e.g., making of boats, traps and other tools).
- Fishermen know they are cooperators in God's beautiful design; they know that the elements (sea, wind, weather) are controlled by God.

Relationship with baptism: Through the waters of baptism, initiation into God the Father's family is celebrated. This blessing provides an excellent occasion to bring forth the intimate connection of mankind with creation; the creative quality of the waters of baptism related to new life may be highlighted.

The essence of baptism is clear. "Your gift of water" places God as the source of water. Through the waters of baptism, people are put in touch with God's life. Tertullian turned to the story of creation:

In this narrative, the waters have two characteristics, which baptism reproduces: it is the primordial element in which life appears, and it is sanctified by the Holy Spirit... The primordial water brought forth life, so that no one should be astonished that in baptism the waters are able to give life.²

You have seen water. But all water does not heal, if the Spirit has not descended and consecrated the water.³

Likewise in the baptismal rite, the prayer over the waters in the baptismal font bring forth the gift-giving quality of water:

In baptism we use your gift of water, which you have made a rich symbol of the grace you give us in this sacrament.⁴

¹ This blessing was contributed by Rev. Regis Halloran, Gardiner Mines, N.S., chairman of the Atlantic Liturgical Conference. A committee of people from fishing communities worked with him to design this blessing. It may be adapted for yachts or pleasure craft, as may the blessing of a vehicle, no. 28, above.

² Tertullian, De Baptismo, 2.


⁴ Rite of Baptism for Children, no. 54a: see Bulletin 29, page 82.
The waters of baptism are to be respected. Hence, in brief, the relationship between the sacrament of baptism and this blessing could well come forth at the time of this blessing. Both are founded upon a deep faith in the living God.

To turn hearts, minds and lives to the God of creation at the beginning of the fishing season is a deep-rooted tradition of fishing villages. This is especially true on the Atlantic and Pacific coastlines, as well as in the villages of the North, where fishermen put out to sea in search of a productive catch. Their harvest provides food for the tables of Canadians, as well as for people in other nations.

Two specific dimensions are present in this suggested blessing:

- The parish comes together in the church, where the first part of the service is held. Highlighted in this is the prayer for the well-being and safety of all members of the village during the fishing season. Following this, a liturgical procession forms and goes to the seashore location for the ritual action of blessing the boats and equipment.

- The parish may gather along the shore for the entire blessing. Here the celebrant will lead them in prayers, readings from the word of God, and hymns, and then proceed to bless the boats gathered in a flotilla. The celebrant may bless them from one of the launched boats, or from a suitable location on the shore.

Planning Group

Members of the planning group should include the celebrant, choir director, readers, fishermen and their families. Their active participation in the preparations will lead to a unified celebration.

Preparations: Points to be considered should include:
- Understanding of blessing, as suggested in this issue of the Bulletin.
- Use of symbols and banners that will speak to all members of the community.
- Good choice of readings, hymns and gestures.
- Practical choice of site for blessing (church or seashore).
- Appropriate time for blessing (such as Sunday afternoon, when most can gather).
- Local customs that may be related to the blessing.
- An ecumenical blessing service may be considered.

Suggested Rite

This outline contains suggested readings, prayers and hymns. The planning group should adapt this celebration according to local needs.

Entrance rite

Entrance hymn

For the beauty of the earth
God created earth and heaven
Come, Holy Ghost
Praise the Lord of heaven

Welcome and introduction

- Mention major theme of blessing, such as creation, importance of season.
- Stress importance of this blessing.
- A plea for mercy would be helpful.
Opening prayer

Let us pray.

All pause for silent prayer.

Father, creator of the universe,
you have given the seas and the life they contain
for the use and benefit of mankind.
Protect the fishermen of this village during this fishing season,
and give them a bountiful catch.

We ask your help, Father,
through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
in the unity of your Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the word

Old Testament readings

Give us water  
Fill the earth and rule it  
God sent Adam to take care of it  
He showed them his treasure, living water  
Their name lives on for ever

Responsorial psalm

Bless the Lord
Psalm 104
Psalm 62
Psalm 107
Psalm 8

New Testament reading

One Lord, one faith, one baptism  
Work heartily, whatever your task  
This is what we saw and heard  
Each of us receives a special gift  
Sowing the harvest of justice in peace

Gospel

A fountain of living water  
Living water will flow from his heart  
We will let out our nets  
They left their nets to follow him  
We are the light of the world  
Tell me to come over the water

Homily

Rededication

• Baptismal promises (see sacramentary, pages 273-274).

• Act of commitment by members of the fishing community, in these or similar words:

Father,
we commit our lives to your service
during this fishing season.
As we sail the seas in search of a bountiful catch,
give us strength and courage to care for your creation.
We place our families in your embrace,
to watch over them and protect them.
We pledge our faithfulness to you
in the lives we lead during this season.
We pledge our labors to you in the spirit of the gospel.

A symbolic gesture may accompany this act of commitment: a lobster trap, slickers, rope, a sand flat (weighted rock) or other similar article may be used.

Litany or intercessory prayers: The full litany of the saints may be sung, as in CBW, pages 66-68, with additional petitions, if desired; a more extended form of the general intercessions may be developed (a model is given in Bulletin 48, pages 130-133); or the form below may be used, adding the names of local patrons.

St. John the Baptist, St. Peter, St. Andrew, St. James, St. John, St. Joseph, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Anne, Holy Mary, the ocean star. pray for us.

Ritual action: All assemble along the seashore after the service in the church. The celebrant prays the blessing either from a lead boat or from a suitable location on the shore.

Father,
you have given your people skills to build boats
in order to harvest the seas.
Bless these boats of our fishermen:
let them bring our men back to land
in safety and with a bountiful catch.

May those who sail the seas,
having these boats as their homes,
be inspired by your Spirit
to have a greater unity with all creation.

This blessing we beg of you
through Christ our Lord.
Amen!

Accompanied by his servers, the celebrant in the lead boat circles the gathered boats, sprinkling the men with holy water.

Blessing of fishermen and families: The celebrant may wish to impart a special blessing upon the community at this time, upon the fishermen and their families.

Closing blessing: This may be given, perhaps in the form of a solemn blessing or prayer over the people.

Closing hymn: CBW
O God of all the many lands no. 438
Prayer of St. Francis 404
Lord Jesus, of you I will sing 398
Holy God, we praise thy name 393
O God, our help in ages past 391
BLESSING OF A BANNER

A banner prepared for church, school or home may be blessed by those who helped to make it. By dedicating the banner and their personal efforts and gifts to the Lord’s service, they are expressing their love in a practical way (see Bulletin 48, pages 108-113). This rite could also be adapted for the blessing of a flag.

- Opening prayer or hymn, perhaps reflecting the theme of the banner.
- Reading: perhaps of the messianic entrance (lectionary, no. 37), or a reading based on the theme of the banner or of the liturgical season for which it is being prepared.
- Homily: Our banner and our lives proclaim the coming of Jesus as savior, and his presence in our generation.
- Prayer of blessing: The theme of the banner may be mentioned in this prayer.

Leader  
Father in heaven, king of glory,  
we praise you for having made the world,  
and for having chosen us as your beloved people.  
Bless † this banner we have made,  
and be pleased with our efforts to serve you.  
Help us to continue to dedicate our lives and our talents  
for your honor and glory  
and for the salvation of your people.  

Praise and thanks are yours, eternal Father,  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord and savior.  

All  
Amen!

- The banner may be placed or hung at this time.
- Lord’s prayer: preferably sung (see CBW, nos. 221-223).
- Blessing of the community or gathering.
- Closing hymn: thanks and praise, or seasonal, or related to the theme of the banner.

GENERAL BLESSING OF ANY OBJECT

God wants his people to use all creation for his honor and glory. As high priests of creation, we offer this praise to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit. In our use of God's creatures, we remember that they were made through the Son of God, and are sustained by him (Heb. 1:2-3; Jn. 1:3).

This blessing is a model, and may be adapted according to the nature of the object to be blessed, and other circumstances. Other elements may be added: singing, readings, general intercessions, litany.

Leader  
Let us pray to our Father in heaven,  
who has given us this (these) N. for our use.  

All pause for silent prayer.

Leader  
Blessed are you, Lord God, king of the universe:  
you have made all things for your glory.  
Bless † this (these) N.,  
and grant that we may use it (them) in your service  
and for the good of all your people.  

Father,  
we praise you through Christ our Lord.

All  
Amen!
BLESSING OF ARTICLES OF DEVOTION

A blessing for pictures, statues, prayer books, rosaries, medals and other articles which may be used to assist us in our prayer and devotion. As the Vatican Council reminds us, popular devotions must be in harmony with the liturgy and with the seasons of the liturgical year; these devotions must also be derived from the liturgy in some way, and lead God's people to the liturgy, which is the source and summit of the Church's activity (Constitution on the liturgy, nos. 13, 10). Candles may be blessed by this rite, or by prayers adapted from the ceremony on February 2 (sacramentary, no. 208, pages 653-654).

- Readings may be chosen from Mt. 5:23-24; Mt. 6:5-15; Mt. 7:7-11; Rom. 8:14-17, 26-27.

- Blessing:

  Leader  Father in heaven,
          we praise you for sending your Spirit into our hearts
          to teach us to pray.
          Bless † this N., and teach us to use it
          as an aid to sincere and devoted prayer.
          May we continue to grow in prayer,
          and be pleasing to you in our lives.
          All praise and glory are yours, Father,
          through Christ our savior,
          in the Holy Spirit,
          God, for ever and ever.

  All         Amen!

HELPFUL READING

Some books which provide useful background for the topics discussed in this issue of the Bulletin:


Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, edited by H. de Romestin. 1884, Parker, Oxford and London. Index, viii, 118 pages. (Several other later editions are available.)


A. G. Martimort, l'Eglise en Prière — introduction à la liturgie, 3rd edition. 1965, Desclée, Tournai. Index, illustrations, xv, 950 pages. (See especially Part III, chapter IX, Les bénédictions, by Dom B. Darragon, pages 659-674; and Part II, section II, chapter IV, no. 8, Per quem haec omnia, by N. M. Denis-Boulet, pages 422-423.)
HALF CENTURY OF UNION

Congratulations to the United Church of Canada, celebrating its fiftieth anniversary on Pentecost Sunday. Formed in 1925 by members of the Congregationalist, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, it has always sought to be a united and a uniting Church; in 1967, the United Evangelical Brethren joined. At present, the United Church is in discussion with the Anglican Church of Canada and the Disciples of Christ; the 1974 General Council passed a motion authorizing the United Church “to begin the long journey toward reunion with the Church of Rome.”

At the plenary assembly of the Canadian Catholic Bishops in September, 1974, the initiative of the United Church was received with appreciation, and was considered a very hopeful and positive sign. Preliminary discussions will be the responsibility of the general secretaries of the two churches.

The United Church’s Service Book * presents an interesting liturgical resource. Contemporary and traditional English is used in various prayers, and several forms are given for the Lord’s supper. A practical and pastoral approach to the psalter is contained in the people’s book. The Christian year begins in September with twelve “Sundays in creation,” leading into the four Sundays before Christmas (our Advent). A three-year lectionary is provided, with references and themes clearly listed. These books are modern in approach, and deserve further study by Catholics.

On the occasion of the United Church’s jubilee, we join with our brothers and sisters in Christ in prayer:

Lord Jesus,
help us all to continue working for unity,
so that we may be one, Lord,
as you and the Father are one. Amen!

* Available in two distinct but interrelated editions: for the use of ministers ($4.50), and for the use of the people ($3.50); from United Church Distribution Services, 47 Coldwater Road, Don Mills, Ontario M3B 1Y9.