

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Those words form one of the shortest and probably one of the most frequently used prayers for Catholics, as well as a summary of the truth we celebrate on this Trinity Sunday. But it is also a blessing prayer, both when invoked by a priest or bishop (or the Pope!) and also when we make that sign on ourselves, whether in our private prayers or at the beginning and end of every Mass.

I was pondering this the last time someone asked me to bless a devotional object for them or as a gift for someone else. I'm always happy to do that, but then I wonder: doesn't everyone realize that we're ALL able to bless objects—or one another—whenever we choose? While I understand the desire to have an ordained person confer a blessing, I think it's also important to recognize one of the rights conferred, not just by the sacrament of Orders, but by Baptism: the right to bless. After all, we do that for ourselves every time we make that Sign of the Cross—with the sole exception at the end of Mass when the blessing is conferred by the presider. Every baptized person has the “priestly power” to bless! My blessing isn't any more special or effective than yours.

I remember the first time, many years ago, when parents told me that they blessed each of their children every night at bedtime. I was so impressed by that and I was happy to discover over the years that many Catholic parents did the same for their children. We all have the “power” to bless! It's rather a shame that, during a certain period of Church history, the grace of blessing was effectively hijacked by the clergy, probably as a form of control but also, in some instances, to make money; the sin of “simony”, the “selling” of grace or blessing, was one of the many clerical abuses that led to the Reformation.

But there is a more ancient history of blessing that resided in the Celtic churches of Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the early centuries of Christianity in those lands—a rich history of “blessing prayers” for everyone and everything imaginable: farming and fishing, birth and death, for the hearth and the home, for the beginning and the end of a journey, for parents, spouses and children. No one felt the need to call for a priest to invoke any of those blessings; they were part of everyday life. I still remember my first trip to the west of Ireland, particularly Galway and the island of Inishmore. One day as I was walking down the road, I overheard two teenage boys greet one another with “God be wi' ye.” A blessing prayer, from teenagers! It astonished me and inspired me. Everyone can bless!

As we celebrate this feast of Father, Son and Spirit, it can be an opportunity for all Christians to reclaim that baptismal right to bless ourselves and one another, our pets and gardens and homes, our comings and our goings—an acknowledgement of our intimate bond with the Holy Trinity, with one another and with all God's creation.

Fr. Bob