

The Spirit of Blessing

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Many years ago I was touched by Corrie ten Boom's story of her sister's attitude toward the vermin that infested the concentration camp. Her sister found blessing in the lice and bedbugs in their sleeping quarters. Because of these insects, the guards did not enter that space. This provided her sister an opportunity to share the Good News of the Gospel with others, bringing them comfort and herself joy. The thought of finding blessing in such a reality was a challenge for me to imagine. Yet life experience has shown that we can find blessing in everything—even what is most painful.

There was a time when, for the most part, I saw anything I considered negative as something to get through. For me, "real life" happened when all was well. It was freeing to face the limits of this attitude and embrace the joys *and* the sorrows as "life." A woman I know sees being stopped by a train as a blessing because it allows her time to slow down and pray for those who are ill. We can choose how to be in our lives at the moment; we can choose to find blessing in an event. In this way we get "unstuck, more balanced." Life is richer; we begin to notice more of those things that are easy to name as blessings, such as a sunset or a smile from a loved one.

Doing this means making a shift within, seeing with a different lens, letting go. At times, it can take considerable courage to stay in the process of working through fears, doubts, hurts, angers, disappointments, attitudes, and sadness to see the blessing, to see the invitation to learn, to grow. Yet we are the people who sing "O happy fault" during the *Exsultet* at the Easter Vigil, referencing the scriptural story of the "sin of Adam and Eve which gained for us so great a Redeemer." We are the people who celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. We are the people who live the Paschal Mystery. We already understand celebrating *both* death *and* resurrection, already know blessing in its many guises. Sometimes we just need to remember what we know. This is why using the word "blessing" or "bless" often and with care-



ful intention can be helpful. Seeing blessing, speaking blessing, ritualizing blessing are reminders that we can live life in its fullness in the midst of great darkness. Naming "blessing" and practicing it, day after day, in small ways can prepare us, I believe, for finding the blessing in the moments that test us to the core. Corrie ten Boom's sister could not have felt blessed in that concentration camp without a "practice of blessing" in her daily life.

"Sacramentals derive from the baptismal priesthood; every baptized person is called to be a 'blessing,' and to bless" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], 1669). This seems in right order, for blessing another without "being a blessing" first might just be so many words spoken without heart. We internalize blessing first; then we can pass it on. Can we slow

down enough to do this mindfully—to notice, to reflect, to bless? Can we take a moment to bless another, for instance, making a Sign of the Cross on the forehead when our child leaves for school in the morning and saying: "God bless your day"? Do we creatively develop simple rituals around blessings, such as asking family members to speak a blessing for the one celebrating a birthday? Many resources are available to spark our imaginations or provide blessings within a more formal ritual. *Giving Thanks at the Table*, *Prayers for Expectant Parents*, *Prayers of the Sick*, and *Catholic Prayers* (all published by Liturgy Training Publications) offer blessings for many experiences. Knowing that "blessing is a divine and life-giving action" (CCC, 1078) encourages us to develop the practice and the "being" of it. In all the ways we live, speak, or ritualize blessing, we are furthering the work of the Spirit and giving praise to God.

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