

Manna 3 – Eighth Session

Blessed Are You, Lord, God of All Creation: Eucharist and Blessing

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*We need to live in thanksgiving, which supposes a soul
experiencing the joy of the LORD's gifts and blessings.*

-To Mrs. Lepage, March 17, 1867

Preface

Whether it was the graces of the day, the works of creation, the gifts of one's vocation, the blessings that flow from the love of our family and friends, (even) the trials and tribulations of life, the great love of God expressed in so many ways, and most importantly, Jesus' gift of self that we celebrate at the Eucharist, Saint Peter Julian Eymard urged the members of his spiritual family and all those to whom he ministered, to live in joyful gratitude. Indeed, he understood the Eucharist as blessing – as suggested in today's session.

Introduction to the Theme

Eucharist as Blessing! There is no more appropriate description of the central mystery of our faith as this term. As far back as the beginning pages of scripture in the book of Genesis we already encountered this term. The Hebrew word for blessing is *berachah*. This term is so central that a midrashic story is woven into it. So, the story goes:

In the beginning when the world was about to be created by God by means of his words, all the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet formed a circle around God's majestic throne. One by one, each letter made obeisance and invoked God:
"Please create the world through me."

The first one that came forward was the letter *Tau* (transliterated as *t*), which said: "I beg you, please create the world through me, since it is through me that you will give the *Torah* to Israel, as it is written: Moses has given us the *Torah*." However, the Holy One, blessed be he, answered: *No*, *Tau* asked "Why?" God answered: "Because a day will come when I am going to choose you to be a sign of death for all peoples." As soon as *Tau* heard this, it withdrew from the presence of God.

Now came the letter *Shin* (transliterated as *sh*) and asked: “God of the world, please create the world through me. Your name *Shaddai* begins with my letter.” Unfortunately, *Shin* also is the beginning letter of *Shaw* (which means a *lie*) and *Sheker* (which means *falsity*). Thus, it was not heard.

The letter *Rosh* (transliterated as *r*) did not have any luck either. The reason is that it is the initial letter of the noun *Ra’* (which means *bad*) and *Rasha’* (which means *evil*). Despite the fact that it also is the beginning letter of the noun *Rashum* (i.e., the name of God that means *merciful*), it was not heard.

The letter *Qof* (transliterated as *q*) was not accepted, notwithstanding that it begins the word *Qadosh* (which means *holy*) because it begins the word *qelalah* (which means *curse*).

In vain did the letter *Zade* (transliterated as *ts*) make its case, although it is the initial letter of *Zaddiq* (which means *just*). However, since there is also the word *Zarot* which means *disgrace*), it did not make it.

The letter *Pe* (transliterated as *p*) had its advantage because it begins with the letter of *Podeh* (which means *liberator*). But since there also is the word *Pesha’* (which means *transgression*), this fact disqualified it.

‘Ain (transliterated as *unappreciable*) was declared right away unworthy because it begins the word *‘Erwah* (which means *immorality*). This was done in spite of the fact that it begins the word *‘Anawah* (which means *humility*), wherefrom we derive the famous phrase *anawim* (*poor*) of Yahweh.

Samek (transliterated as *s*) said: “I beg you Lord, please begin creation with me, since you yourself are called *Samek*, “he who sustains everyone who falls.” But God answered “Remain where you are. Continue sustaining those who fall!”

The letter *Nun* (transliterated as *n*) introduces *Ner* (which means *lamp* of God), the guide of all; however, it also can mean the *lamp* of the wicked upon whom God will triumph.

Mem (transliterated as *m*) is the initial of *Melek* (meaning *king*), one of the titles of God. However, since it also is the initial of *Mehumah* (meaning *confusion*), its request was rejected.

The claim of *Lamed* (transliterated as *l*) falls short of its own reasoning. It defends itself by saying that it begins the word *Luhot*, the heavenly tablets of the ten commandments, but it forgets that these very same tablets were thrown down by Moses and reduced to pieces.

The letter *Kaf* (transliterated as *k*) was sure of its own victory. In fact, whether one speaks of *Kisseh* (meaning *throne* of God), *Kahod* (meaning *glory*), or *Kite* (meaning *crown*), all begin with the letter *k*. However, God had to remind it of the day when he would have to shake his hands (in Hebrew *Kaf* means to *shake the hands in desperation*) for the disgraces of Israel.

At first impression, it would seem that the letter *Yod* (transliterated as *y*) would be the best bet, being the initial letter of *Yahweh*. But what goes against it is that it also begins the letter of the phrase *yetser ha-Ra'*, which means *tendency towards evil*.

Tet (a special *t* in Hebrew) is the beginning of the word *Toh* (meaning *good*). However, the true good belongs only to the future and not of this world.

The letter *Het* (transliterated as *ch*) is the first letter of *Hanun* (meaning *gracious* or *benevolent*). But even this is not enough because it also is the initial of the word *Hatta'* (meaning *sin*).

The letter *Zain* (transliterated as *z*) reminds us of *Zakor* (which means *memory*), but it also means *army* (figuratively), workers of misdeeds, or simply, *weapons*.

The letters *Waw* (transliterated as *w*) and *He* (transliterated as *h*) form the ineffable name of God in *Yahweh*. However, since they occupy such a lofty place they are no longer interested in mundane things.

Concerning *Dalet* (equivalent to *d*), it would have been an easy choice since it begins the word *Dabar* (meaning *word*). Unfortunately, it is the initial letter of the word *Din* (meaning *justice*). A world guided solely by justice without mercy could mean disaster.

Finally, even the letter *Gimel* (transliterated as *g*) was set aside. The reason is because it is the initial of *Gemul* (meaning *retribution*), even if there also is the word *Gadol* (meaning *great*).

After the letters had presented their petitions giving the strongest possible arguments, the letter *Bet* (transliterated as *b*) approached God and prayed: “Lord of the world, please, I beg you, create the world through me, so that all the inhabitants of the world will praise you every day through me as it is often said, blessed be the Lord everyday forever and ever.

Amen.” The Holy One, blessed be he, welcomed right away the request of *Bet* and said: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” And thus, God created the world through *Bet*, as it is written: “*Bereshit (in the beginning)* God created the heavens and the Earth.”

The only letter that abstained from making any demand from God was the letter ‘*Alef*’ (transliterated as ‘*a*’). Later, God rewarded it by giving it the first place in the Decalogue.

This midrashic story, so poetic and interesting, expresses the inexhaustible richness of all reality. Among all the letters of the alphabet, it is through *Bet* that the world was created, because it forms the initial of *berachah*. It is upon *berachah* that the world stands, and only *berachah* has the power to disclose fullness of meaning.

Opening Prayer

Blessed are you LORD God of all creation.
You have created us out of your goodness
and thus, we have become ourselves loveable.
We bless your holy name and
we acknowledge your fundamental stance towards us.
As you have blessed us, make us respond to you in a reciprocal
blessing of gratitude and praise for all created realities,
for our own giftedness,
for Jesus Christ, your Son, our brother and Savior
in the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen

Song:

- “Blest Be the LORD,” by Dan Schutte

Work Exercise

1. Recall the contents of the first creation story (Genesis 1). How many times is the vocabulary of blessing mentioned?
2. Still in the context of Genesis 1, we see God's original action as blessing. The way we have been brought up in the past in our religious tradition was so much focused on original sin. How has this affected your images of God? How different might it be if the focus was on *berachah* or blessing?
3. Read Ephesians 1:3-12. It gives us a beautiful summary of all the blessings given to us by God the Father through his son Jesus Christ. List these blessings and think about how they apply to your daily life.
4. Read Matthew's account of the institution of the LORD's Supper (26:26-28). Do you see a rich theological implication in the fact that Matthew uses the two verbs of "to bless" (*berak*) and "to give thanks" (*eulogein*) in his institution account? Why do you think that the verb *eucharistein* (to give thanks) from which we derive the noun *eucharistia* (thanksgiving) finally became the name for the entire rite of the Eucharist? Why not the name *berachah*, or blessing, for that matter? Does it really make a difference?

The work exercise is followed by a small group sharing and a large group sharing.

Teaching

Blessing or *berachah* initiates us into the heart of God, that inner sanctum where we come into contact with God's own fundamental stance towards us and all of creation. This fundamental stance is the horizon of blessing that sparks into a network of relationships with him, others, ourselves, and the world. To use another image, we intuit a whole circularity of blessings moving from heaven to earth, with God blessing people, people blessing God, God blessing people again, their flocks and their fields, with the resulting empowerment that enables them to share their blessings with one another.

1. God blesses us.

The parable of the Hebrew alphabet illustrates the importance of *berachah/blessing*. In the beginning pages of scripture in the book of Genesis, we encounter God in his fundamental action of blessing, whereby he declares everything that he has made as good. We see God here initiating his relationship with humanity on the simplest level of nature or natural life (the giving of trees, fruits, water, animals, and more). But God gives not only these. He also gives the necessary means for humanity to sustain itself and to make it capable of recognizing all of these as "gifts" coming from his hands and therefore to be received in faith and thanksgiving. Deuteronomy 8:7-10 illustrates this very clearly.

On a more personal level God, being the source of life, communicates his very life to humanity. He provides the means to sustain it (food and drink), and gives the capacity for multiplication and transmission to its descendants. It is noteworthy to mention that the first blessings of God to humanity were directed towards having descendants and future and messianic promises. God blesses the first man and woman (Genesis 1:28) so that they will multiply; Noah (Genesis 9:1); Abraham and in his person, all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:2-3); he blesses David and promises him descendants to his throne (2 Samuel 7:29); God blesses the entire people in their entry into the land, although he puts before them the choice between blessing and curse, between life and death, between good and evil (Deuteronomy 16:15; 23:21; 28:2-8; 30:15-19). Thus, in their Feast of Weeks – the feast that celebrates the first harvest – each one must offer to the LORD in the measure of "the blessings" received from God (Deuteronomy 16:10).

2. We bless God.

A concrete biblical example of a response to God's blessings is the story recounted in Genesis 24 where we read how Abraham set about finding a wife for Isaac, his son. Isaac was his heir and for the bearer of such a destiny none of the local Canaanite women are deemed worthy. The wife of the future bearer of the promise must come only from among Abraham's own people back in his native country, Mesopotamia. We see Abraham

dispatching his servant on the long journey to Haran to choose a wife from among his own kinfolk.

Upon arriving, the servant of Abraham prayed to God for success in his search and determined on a particular divine sign that would help him to recognize the girl God had decreed for Isaac. He had not finished his prayer when Rebecca was seen coming towards him. Rebecca acts just as it has been arranged in the servant's prayer. What is more, she turns out to be a relative of Abraham. Clearly, this is the one chosen by God. The servant is overwhelmed by such evidence of God's mercy and by the prompt answer to his prayer. He falls to his knees and prays as follows (Confer Genesis 24:27):

Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham

This account is taken from one of the oldest sections of the Bible. It illustrates clearly a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, giving glory to God for his marvelous providence. It does enshrine a sense of wonder and awe at the mystery of an infinite God who takes a personal interest in the life of his people. In the face of this God, the only appropriate response is that of blessing him in return in the form of thanksgiving and overflowing joy.

3. We bless one another.

We see in the scripture that *blessing* is a relational term – from the commonplace greeting addressed to a stranger on the street (2 Kings 4:29) or to the customary formula of courtesy (Genesis 47:7, 10; 1 Samuel 13:10), or to more intimate human encounters. Instances of the latter are those blessings that the patriarchs give to their descendants beginning with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the judges, and later the kings, prophets, and wise men.

A classic example is the blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26. Though this is a priestly blessing directed towards the sons of Israel, it is a good formula to use in blessing one another:

May the LORD bless you: blessing, the power of life in all its manifestations. May God fill us with his life so that this will flow in and through our relationships.

And keep you: literally, “guard over you.” Anti-life forces are about, both within us and without in the world around us. Life needs watching over, guarding, protecting, and keeping.

May the LORD shine his face upon you: Darkness belongs to the kingdom of death. God's first move in subduing the chaos at the beginning is to say: "Let there be light."

And be gracious to you: more frequently in the Psalms this same expression is translated: "have pity on us" and is common in the contexts of lament (Psalm 65). In our weakness and need we call on the LORD who is compassionate and filled with pity toward us.

May the LORD look upon you with kindness: In the Hebrew this is literally, "May the LORD lift his face to you." One of the sources of pain and confusion in laments is that God's face is hidden. We feel alone and forsaken: "When you hid your face, I was terrified" (Psalm 30:8: Cf. 10:11; 22:25). We pray to enjoy the presence of God.

And give you peace, (shalom): the wholeness and integrity of relationship with self, others, the world and God.

4. **We bless things.**

Things are not blessed as such, because only living beings are eligible to receive blessings; inanimate objects are consecrated to the service of God and sanctified in his presence.

The blessing of consecrating things is, in a way, an expression of our sensitivity to the generosity of God in the gifts of creation and thus prepares us to dispose ourselves to accept these generousities of his grace. A clear example is the account of the blessings that Jacob imparted to his sons in Genesis 29. Specifically, we take note of the oracle of Jacob about Joseph. Here we see all the images of creational blessings – fecund life, water, and the sky, "the blessings of the Heaven above, the blessings of the abyss below, the blessings of the breasts and the womb" (v. 25) gathered into a startling compendium.

In the New Testament, before multiplying the loaves (Matthew 14:19ff), before distributing the bread that became his body (Matthew 26:26ff), and before the breaking of the bread at Emmaus (Luke 24:30), Jesus pronounces a blessing; on the receiving end, we as followers "bless the chalice of blessing" (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Finally, in our Eucharistic celebration, the liturgy of the Eucharist begins with a prayer over bread and wine, thus:

Blessed are you, LORD, God of all creation.
Through your goodness we have this bread to offer,

fruit of the earth, the work of human hands.
It will become for us the bread of life. *Blessed be God for ever.*

Blessed are you, LORD, God of all creation.
Through your goodness we have this wine to offer,
fruit of the vine and work of human hands.
It will become our spiritual drink. *Blessed by God for ever.*

5. Christ is the climax of our blessings.

It is worth noting that the last visible action of Christ on earth was an act of blessing that he bestowed on his church (Luke 24:50ff). It is a powerful image that evokes what Saint Paul says in his letter to the Romans: no one can separate us from the love of Christ (8:55ff). How could God, having delivered his own Son for us, refuse us anything (Romans 8:32)? In Christ, God has given us everything; we lack no gift of grace (1 Corinthians 1:7) and are blessed with every sort of spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3-14). In Christ we give thanks to God for all gifts (Roman 1:8; Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17).

In other words, the descending and ascending movements of grace are summarized in Christ. On the one hand the descending movement of grace towards us and on the other hand the ascending movement of our thanksgiving find their recapitulation in him. Beyond this horizon of blessing, we can say nothing anymore for us as we hear in the book of Apocalypse, the throng of the elect assembled before the lamb chant: “Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving . . . forever and ever! (7:12).

6. Eucharist as the celebration of our blessings.

Our saving blessing finds its succinct expression in the context of the institution of the Eucharist. On the one hand, the accounts of Eucharistic institution give us the theological meaning of the cruel passion of Christ. On the other hand, they render present to us the person of Christ in a sacramental way in the life of the church throughout all of its history. From these accounts we see the juxtaposition of the verbs *to bless/eulogēin* and *to give thanks/eucharistein*. Matthew (26:26-28) and Mark (14:22-24) use the word *eulogēsas* over the bread and *eucharistesas* over the wine, while Luke and Paul use solely the verb *eucharistesas* for both bread and wine.

Without going into a highly complex discussion, this account from Matthew (dependent from his source Mark) gives us a fixed narrative sequence of *taking, blessing/thanking, breaking, and giving*, which permits us to peer through its direct provenance in the Eucharistic celebration of the early apostolic church. The juxtaposition of blessing and breaking means that the table companions are put into direct communion with Christ the Redeemer, with his body and his blood – and are made participants in the richness of the

LORD's gift of himself. Christ *blesses* God with his redemptive work. He then makes this available to all believers for all generations to come through the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Summing up, we can say that the blessing-saving of *berachah* of the Old Testament finds its fulfillment in Christ the Redeemer and its sacramental representation for all ages in the mystery of the Eucharist.

Resource helps for this teaching:

- *To Be Human Before God*, by Michael D. Guinan. The Liturgical Press, 1994.
- *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, by Xavier Leon-Defour. Geoffrey Chapman, 1967.
- *The Eucharist*, by Raymond Moloney. Geoffrey Chapman, 1995.

Closing Prayer

If in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, exposition is made during the opening hymn. When the hymn is concluded, the assembly kneels in silence for several minutes. During this silence, the community welcomes the presence of the Risen LORD before them in the Blessed Sacrament and within them as the LORD'S own body.

Opening Song: "One Blessing Cup" by Michael Joncas

Opening Prayer

Blessed are you LORD God of all creation
who in your immense love
has made us into your image and likeness.
As we pray before your Son,
in the sacrament of his presence in our midst,
we realize that he is your true image.

We take, therefore, these few moments to let the radiance of his face penetrate us
so that we may truly become what you have made us to be in him,
conformed in his image.
As we enter more fully into prayer
make our minds supple and generous in spirit
and bless us with your kindness and steadfast love.
This we ask in the name of your son Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever and ever. Amen.

First Reading: Genesis 1:1-2, 4a

A Meditation: Psalm 104

(Response: Blessing, thanksgiving, and glory to you, O LORD)

Leader: Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent. ***Response***

L: You set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you

ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers. **Response**

L: You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. **Response**

L: At your rebuke they flee, at the sound of your thunder they take to flight. They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them. You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth. **Response**

L: You make springs gush forth in the valleys, they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. **Response**

L: From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart. **Response**

L: The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. In them the birds build their nests; the stork has its home in the fir trees. The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the rabbits. **Response**

L: You have made the moon to mark the seasons, the sun knows its time for setting. You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out. The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. **Response**

L: When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens. People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening. O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. **Response**

L: Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are they, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. **Response**

L: These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. **Response**

L: May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works, who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. **Response**

L: I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD. Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD! **Response**

Song: “All Good Gifts,” words by Mattias Claudius, music by Kevin Kell.

Second Reading: Numbers 6:24-26

Meditation:

Our God is a God of blessing. We are made in God’s image and likeness.
Through his Son Jesus Christ, we are called to be bearers of this blessing.

Lector: May the Lord bless you. May the power of his life fill you and invigorate you.

Response: *Praise the Lord O my soul, praise the LORD.*

Lector: May the LORD keep you; may the LORD guard over you; may the LORD watch your steps and keep you sound in your struggles over evil. **Response:**

Lector: May the LORD shine his face upon you. May the LORD illumine your days; may darkness not prevail over you. **Response:**

Leader: May the LORD be gracious to you; may the LORD have pity on you; in your weakness, may the LORD have compassion for you. **Response:**

Lector: May the LORD look upon you with kindness; may the LORD console you in your sadness and loneliness; may he strengthen you in your fear. **Response:**

Lector: May the LORD give you peace; may God’s shalom suffuse you, may wholeness and integrity strengthen your relationships with yourself, others, and the world. May his glory which makes human beings truly alive transfigure you! **Response:**

If in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, incensing of the Blessed Sacrament and the assembled community occurs after the prayers. Consider using the ritual books for Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery Outside of Mass (2024) that provides this ritual texts of prayer, praise, The Lord’s Prayer, etc.

Incensing of the Blessed Sacrament and the assembled community: optional

Benediction: optional

Reposition: optional

Closing Prayer:

We bless you loving God and we thank you for the moments of prayer before the Eucharist.
May the teachings we have heard and contemplated
fill our consciousness of your blessings
and expand our hearts with gratitude so that our life becomes a living Eucharist for all.
Through your son Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever and ever. Amen.

Song: “Blest Be the Lord,” by Dan Schutte

Dismissal with some sign of peace:

