

DIVINE BLESSINGS

Transform | Sanctify | Heal

Blessings transform

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that "Blessing is a divine and life-giving action, the source of which is the Father; His blessing is both word and gift." Divine blessings cannot be something that we merely possess, have or enjoy; but they are gifts that indeed possess us, changing us and our relationship with God such that the proper response on our part to these divine blessings is continuous "adoration and surrender to our Creator in thanksgiving (CCC#1078) Basically, we cannot truly receive divine blessings and still live our lives as usual, something must change in us and our relationship with God.

God's Blessings

Having received God's numerous blessings, we can ask ourselves these questions.

- How has God's blessings of faith, hope, love, mercy, life, impacted us and our relationship with Him in any way?
- In our striving for holiness, have we become discouraged by our repeated failures and inability to overcome obstacles?
- Has the fervour of our prayer life diminished because of lack of visible results?



Suffering, a Blessing in Disguise

The whole world is still encompassed with the pandemic. The coronavirus has caused significant lifestyle changes: lots of plans and dreams and itineraries have been stalled, altered or cancelled altogether. This pandemic reminds us that we are not in control. Life is precarious, unpredictable and uncertain. This Lunar New Year has limitations of 8 visitors as the pandemic continues. Everyone has been negatively affected by the virus in one way or another. Because of this, the world considers Covid-19 to be a curse. It is easy to become bitter, lukewarm and some even blame God for this.

Crisis makes us focus and depend more on God. When we turn to God during crisis, He comes to our aid. We may even say that a crisis increases our faith in God. As St Paul says, "...knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produce hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit that has given us" (Romans 5:3-5).





Blessing of Oranges

The blessing of oranges is specially prayed in Singapore parishes. Here is the prayer for our personal reflection on what the blessing of oranges signifies for us. When prayed devoutly, the prayer becomes a blessing for us and our families as we exchange the blessed oranges during our visits to one another.

Priest: Our Help is in the name of the Lord

People: Who made heaven and earth

Priest: O Lord, hear our prayers

People: And let our cries come unto You

Priest: The Lord be with you

People: And with your spirit

Let us pray, Almighty Everlasting God, we offer You today oranges, because of their sweetness and golden colour; they have become for us the symbol of prosperity and happiness. In our home the offering of this fruit has also become a sign of kindness and good wishes. In Your goodness, pour down Your blessing + upon these oranges that You have created. Grant that by this invocation of Your Holy Name, all of us, who will partake of them, may receive the health of body and protection of souls, be prosperous in all kinds of good works and practice of Christian virtues. Let us feel in our heart the sweetness of Your love for us, through the same Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God for ever and ever. Amen.

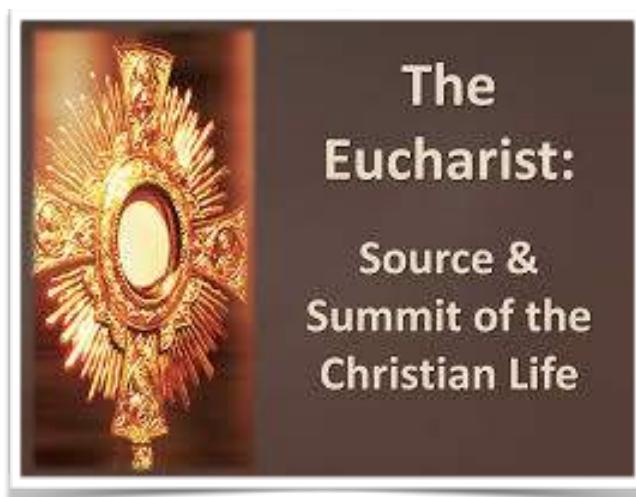
Instead of wallowing in negativity of thoughts, let us count our blessings. Let's ask God what He might be teaching us through the crisis. For we can always count on God's Divine Blessings.

If we are reading this now means that we are still alive. Millions have lost a family member, relative and friend to Covid-19. Celebrations and social activities may come to a halt, but God's Divine Blessings never comes to a halt.

We are blessed to have many online Masses and also onsite Masses in all parishes here in Singapore. Instead of complaining about not being able to get a mass booked for special days, we can be grateful for masses we attended on weekdays. Some have said, "I don't get anything out of Mass." Maybe they have it backwards. We don't come to Mass to get something. We come to Mass to give something, and that something is our thanks to our good and gracious God for the blessings that we have received. Some also asked CSC to open its doors and for more activities and events to resume. Yet patience and prudence teach us otherwise. Do we go to mass regularly and take the trouble to book a mass on weekdays if we cannot get a Sunday mass?

The Greek word "eucharisteo" means "to give thanks." The Catechism states that the Eucharist "is an act of thanksgiving to God" (No. 1329). The entire Mass is a prayer of thanksgiving, which is stated explicitly in some prayers and implied throughout. The priest says, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God," and the congregation replies, "It is right and just." The Preface continues, "It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father." The Preface concludes with the "Holy, Holy," a hymn of praise that gives thanks to God.

Similarly, the words of the doxology are, "Through him and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, for ever and ever", a joyful song of praise to offer thanks to God.



During this pandemic what thanks can we render to God for the Lunar New Year we have just celebrated? What Divine blessings have come to us during this pandemic? Let us reflect on a few of these blessings among the many other blessings we receive from God daily.



Blessing of new technology

In the early days of Covid-19 back in February 2020, we could not meet for worship together. Zoom and YouTube allowed us to worship and attend online Masses, seminars and talks. These brought many blessings too, and donations to our churches. God's divine blessings poured upon so many people through healing and renewal of faith in these dark times of the pandemic. What we can do is open our hearts to receive these blessings. We

hardly hear of the word 'zoom' prior to Covid-19. The pandemic has 'forced' many people to learn and use new technology to connect to God and to one another. Technology is a gift from God which, when harnessed with wisdom and prudence, can be one of His many blessings.

Blessing of R & R (Rest & Reflect)

Most of us live busy and active lives prior to Covid-19. With lockdowns and scaling down in social activities, slowly and gradually, God, led us into stillness, solitude, with less action. We are invited to turn off the 'Martha' and embrace the 'Mary' (Luke 10:38-42). Now we have time to rest and reflect. Because of the time to reflect, we are organising our lives to do things patiently, quietly and reflectively and do things differently. Some even made new resolutions to deepen their spiritual life. By slowing down, we have more time for personal prayer, meditation, reflection and introspection which is much needed in our relentless lifestyle.

Blessing of the lesson of Humility

The pandemic has brought many nations and people on their knees. We are not able to solve every problem of sickness and health. This is a humbling experience not only to human pride and power, but a necessary painful lesson for each individual. Nations thought they can solve issues through power and control, negating the real power which is in God's Almighty Hands. We have learnt to be humble and do all we can praying fervently to God and waiting patiently in humility, trusting in the goodness of God.

Blessing of Cleanliness

Hygiene is required to combat Covid-19. The three 'do-nots' (1) Do not touch your mouth; (2) Do not touch your eyes; and (3) Do not touch your nose are important hygiene-based practices at all times. Many who do not wash their hands regularly, now change their behaviour. Cleanliness is not merely an option but an essential preventive measure against disease. Including the wearing of face masks. Hence, doing so is not only hygienic but a moral responsibility of each and every one.

Everything can be turned into blessing, even the sufferings of the pandemic. We need to have the eyes of faith and a heart of discernment to enter into the mystery of Divine Blessings. We pray during this Lunar New Year that our tiny red dot, Singapore and the world will emerge stronger, healthier, kinder and wiser after the pandemic. Instead of throwing ourselves into the worry and anxiety mode let us count our blessings. All these divine blessings are offered us to change us and to deepen our relationship with God till we begin to do all not for any personal gain. Life provides us with many opportunities to reflect on our attitude to God's blessings. These moments compel us to ask if we are merely possessing these blessings or allowing them to transform us deeply so that we live no longer for ourselves but for the greater glory of God.

We cannot allow our failures or lack of results diminish our determination to live for God alone. These are all examples of moments that call us to once again remind ourselves that the blessings that we have received cannot leave us the same but transform our lives so that we in turn become a blessing to others. Let us recall in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass that *"In the Church's liturgy the divine blessing is fully revealed and communicated"* (CCC#1082). We have every blessing that we need for the life of personal holiness and for continuously seeking the greater glory of God till we draw our last breath. We have been blessed by God, we are being blessed by God now and we will always be blessed by God. We will not receive these blessing in vain if we allow them to possess and transform us completely to the point where we cease to live for ourselves but for God's greater glory alone.

A Timeless Blessing

"The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."

(Numbers 6:24-26)

A benediction asks God for divine blessing, help, guidance, and peace. This famous priestly blessing continues to be used as part of worship today in Christian and Jewish faith communities and is universally used in Roman Catholic services. The Benediction Prayer comes from the book of Numbers beginning with verse 24, in which the Lord instructed Moses to have Aaron and his sons bless the children of Israel with a special pronouncement of security, grace, and peace. This prayerful blessing is packed with meaning for worshipers and divides into six parts:

May the Lord Bless You...Here, the blessing summarises the covenant between God and His people. Only in relationship with God, with Him as our Father, are we truly blessed.

And Keep You...God's protection keeps us in covenant relationship with him. As the Lord God kept Israel, Jesus Christ is our Shepherd, who will keep us from getting lost.

The Lord Make His Face Shine Upon You...God's face represents His Presence. His face shining upon us speaks of His smile and the pleasure He takes in His people.

And Be Gracious to You...The result of God's pleasure is His grace toward us. We don't deserve His grace and mercy, but because of His love and faithfulness, we receive it.

The Lord Turn His Face Towards You...God is a personal Father who pays attention to His children as individuals. We are His chosen ones.

And Give You Peace. Amen...This conclusion affirms that covenants are formed for the purpose of securing peace through a right relationship. Peace represents well-being and wholeness. When God gives His peace, it is complete and eternal.

A very Happy, Blessed Lunar New Year to all



CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY CENTRE
Encountering God • Healing Hearts • Empowering Lives

Fr. Andrew Wong, Spiritual Director & Veronica Nathan, Programme Manager/Counsellor