

Concluding Rite of the Mass – the Priest’s blessing

In the liturgy of the Roman rite of the Catholic Church, only the priest can use the words, ***May the Lord bless you.***

If a lay person is conducting a communion service, or the liturgy of the hours, they can only use *May the Lord bless us.*

Why is this so? The answer is in the Bible.

Numbers 6:22-26:

The Lord God spoke to Moses and said, ‘Say this to Aaron and his sons:

“This is how you are to bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord let His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord uncover His face to you and bring you peace.”

This is how they are to call down My name on the sons of Israel, and I will bless them.”

May the Lord bless you is directly taken from Numbers 6:24

When God gives a directive like this for a priest to use His words, then when that directive is obeyed by the priest, God’s power to bless is released over the people.

We are more used to thinking like this when the priest obeys the directive of Jesus and says, ***This is My body; This is My blood.***

May the Lord bless us, in contrast, is really only a prayer request.

God desires to bless His people:

Deuteronomy 28:1-2:

But if you obey the voice of the Lord your God faithfully, keeping and observing all those commandments of His that I enjoin on you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All the blessings that follow shall come up and overtake you if you only obey the voice of the Lord your God.

(Then there is a long list of the kinds of blessings to expect.)

When was this blessing expected to take place? At the conclusion of the liturgical rites.

Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 50:13-21:

When all the sons of Aaron in their glory, with the offerings of the Lord in their hands, stood before the whole assembly of Israel, while he (Simon, high priest, son of Onias) completed the rites at the altars, presenting in due order the offering for the Most High, the Almighty, reaching out his hand to the cup, and pouring a libation of the juice of the grape, pouring it at the foot of the altar, an appeasing fragrance to the Most High, the King of all, then the sons of Aaron would shout and blow their trumpets of beaten metal, making a mighty sound ring out as a reminder before the Most High; and immediately the people all together would fall on their faces to the ground, in adoration of their Lord, the Almighty, God Most High, and with the cantors chanting their hymns of praise sweet was the melody of all these voices, as the people pleaded with the Lord Most High, and prayed in the presence of the Merciful, until the service of the Lord was completed, and the ceremony at an end. Then he would come down and raise his hands over

the whole concourse of the sons of Israel, to give them the Lord's blessing from his lips, being privileged to pronounce His name; and once again the people would bow low to receive the blessing from the Most High.

When pronouncing these words of blessing, ***May the Lord bless you***, the priest isn't speaking in his own name, but in God's name.

Sadly some priests are using *May the Lord bless us* instead of God's words.

Perhaps that is because they wish to make things feel inclusive and team-like.

Perhaps that is because it feels like they are 'missing out'.

They will never ever miss out when using God's directive ***May the Lord bless you***.

Acts 20:35 St Paul speaks to the elders of the church of Ephesus, it is a farewell speech: 'I did this to show you that this is how we must exert ourselves to support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, who Himself said, "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving".'

Luke 6:38 Jesus says:

'Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap; because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back.'

We often think this passage only refers to temporal things. But it applies to blessings too.

Give blessings, and there will be blessings for you, a full measure.... etc.

God cannot be outdone in generosity.

Whenever a priest uses God's formula for a blessing, ***May the Lord bless you***, God's grace and blessing flow out to the people, and the more he blesses people using God's words, the more grace and blessing he will himself receive. God's word guarantees it.