



Christ Blessing by Francesco Traini, Auckland Art Museum

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Professional learning seminars

THLS502 Liturgical Music taught by Prof Clare Johnson and special guests, 7-10 July 2025.

See: acu.edu.au/PL-CfL for details.

Find out more, visit

acu.edu.au/centreforliturgy

FROM THE DIRECTOR



In December 2023, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a declaration on the pastoral meaning of blessings called *Fiducia Supplicans* (FS). This declaration received a mixed reception, with coverage tending to focus on its clarification and reform of the Catholic Church's treatment of people in irregular relationships, and the Church's decision to permit Catholic priests and deacons to perform 'spontaneous blessings' of these relationships informally, and outside of a liturgical context with no special ceremony or rite. What much of the coverage of FS overlooked is the opportunity this document provides for the Church to focus anew on our long and rich tradition of offering liturgical blessings for a myriad of occasions both special and ordinary.

Liturgical blessings call upon God using both praise and supplication, to request God's favour on people, places and things, or to ask God to restrain the power of evil in the world.

In this issue, our authors provide insights into the Book of Blessings, one of the Church's less well-known liturgical books, exploring its breadth and its variety of celebratory forms.

Todd Williamson investigates the scriptural origins of liturgical Blessings, their ritual outline, occasional foci and leadership possibilities. Paul Taylor offers a glimpse into the variety of occasions for which the Church has prepared Blessing liturgies, emphasising the wonderful model they provide for Christian prayer more generally. All Blessings flow from the proclamation of the Word of God and presume the active presence of an assembly that sings, listens, intercedes, praises God and opens themselves to receiving his divine blessing. Liturgical Blessings are an act of faith and do not work without the presence of faith. May we faithfully celebrate God's blessings often and well.

Professor Clare V. Johnson

Director, ACU Centre for Liturgy



Professor of Liturgical Studies and Sacramental Theology, Faculty of Theology and Philosophy



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FROM OUR BOARD OF ADVISORS

Like many previous popes, Pope Francis has written on a diverse range of topics – the environment, marriage, and the Eucharist, to name a few. In *Desiderio Desideravi*, his 2022 work on the Sacred Liturgy, rather than a new instruction or a directory with specific norms on the way we celebrate liturgy within the Church, Francis offers a meditation to understand the beauty of liturgical celebration and its role in evangelisation. In it, he teaches that we really and truly encounter God – mediated through material symbols – in the liturgy, and that through that encounter with Him, He makes us divine.

One of the key features of the document is the Pope's reminder of the need for a serious and vital liturgical formation for all the people of God. How many lay people, for example, are aware of all the wonderful prayers and rituals of Blessing in the Church's Book of Blessings (1989) – many of which they can lead? Francis is quite firm in stating that we do not simply need to know what the text of the liturgy says and what the rubrics instruct. And we do not need to let ourselves be carried away with the 'spirit' of liturgical renewal. Instead, he argues, there must be a serious and vital formation in the liturgy: spiritually, practically, mentally, and academically. He reminds us that it is

always a task of liturgical leaders to invest time and effort into the work of deepening our appreciation and love of the sacred rites that we have received.

This is why the mission of the ACU Centre for Liturgy is so important, and why the university is committed to providing liturgical formation through the Centre for the whole of the Australian Church and the region.



Rev. Anthony Casamento CSMA is Vice-President of Australian Catholic University.

NEWS AND RECENT EVENTS

On 14 and 15 February 2025, Cathy Murrowood and Paul Taylor offered workshops on liturgical music for Holy Spirit Parish, and parishioners from the Northern Deanery at Gungahlin, ACT.

Professor Johnson authored "Evolución actual de la inculturación litúrgica," *Phase 65/375* (Feb-Mar 2025): 25-35, published by the Centre de Pastoral Litúrgica, Barcelona, Spain.

Following the ACU Centre for Liturgy's highly successful scholarly symposium (3-5 December 2023) marking the 60th anniversary of Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, a refereed book titled *Sacrosanctum Concilium: Exploring Liturgical Futures* is due to

be published in April 2025 by Springer Nature / Palgrave MacMillan. Edited by Clare V. Johnson, Gerard Moore and Peter G. Williams, this volume covers a variety of future-focused topics with chapters authored by experienced and emerging liturgical scholars.

LITURGY SPOTLIGHT

Blessings: Scriptural, Liturgical and Ministerial aspects



Blessing the Community - Presiding Celebrant Fr Danai Penollar PP. Photo: Giovanni Portelli

In the opening pages of Scripture, in the first story of creation found in the Book of Genesis (Gen 1 – 2:3), the author of all life is recorded to have "blessed" three times: he blessed the creatures of the water and of the air (Gen 1: 22); he blessed humankind (Gen 1:28) and he blessed the seventh day, "and made it holy" (Gen 2:3). Throughout all of the tasks of creation, it is recorded many times that "God saw

that it was good" (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Blessing and goodness have been intertwined since the beginning of time.

In the Introduction to the *Book of Blessings*, the Church notes that "He who is all good has made all things good, so that he might fill his creatures with blessings and even after the Fall he has continued his blessings as a sign of his merciful love." (n. 1).

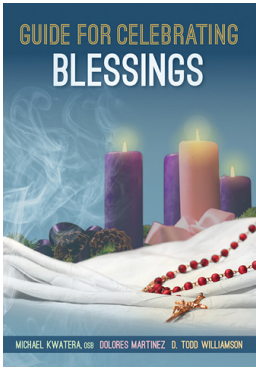
As a collection of liturgical prayer, the *Book of Blessings* includes blessings for almost any situation: a Blessing of Children, a Blessing on the Occasion of a Birthday, a Blessing of the Sick, a Blessing of Boats and Fishing Gear, a Blessing of a New Building, a Blessing of Pets on the Feast of St. Francis ... and many others.

Through Blessings, the Church specifically asks God for something. We ask God to be present in a specific situation: in the pregnancy of a woman, in the departure of someone from our parish, in the building of a factory or an

office, in the use of an Advent Wreath, in the meeting of an organisation or a group, in the reality of elderly people who are confined to their home.

Through Blessings we ask God to show himself using a specific object: a rosary, an automobile, seeds that will be planted, the Christmas tree in our home. Through Blessings we ask God to act, to do something, to have an effect: to strengthen this sick person, to bless the people who will enter this new building, to remind us of the power of our baptism through the sprinkling of this water, to bring to harvest these seeds.

Blessings are liturgies of the Church. They are part of the official, communal worship of the Church. They have an Order, or a structure. There are specified roles and ministries. Some Blessings may be celebrated within Mass, while others may be celebrated outside of Mass. Blessings are Liturgical Prayer: so, there are Opening Rites, there is song and hymnody, the proclamation of the Word;



there are often intercessions, the praying of the Lord's Prayer. There is a prayer of Blessing in which we ask God to continue doing something good for us in a specific

situation, and there are Closing Rites.

One of the first things noted in the General Introduction of the *Book of Blessings*, is the need for the presence of the People of God. These are communal celebrations. Proper ministers should be present in any Order of Blessing: lectors, cantors and musicians, servers, greeters and other ministers of hospitality.

Some of the blessings are specifically

reserved to the Bishop as the rightful celebrant at Blessings that involve the whole diocesan community: the blessing of a new altar, the installation of a new pastor. Some of the Orders of Blessing require a priest or a deacon to celebrate. The priest would be the appropriate celebrant: "especially [at those blessings] that involve the community he is appointed to serve (n. 18b)." So too a Deacon may preside at particular Blessings when the Bishop or a priest are not present.

"In virtue of the universal priesthood, a dignity they possess because of their baptism and confirmation (n. 18d)," laymen and laywoman may also preside at Orders of Blessings when the rubrics allow for it. So, the blessings of a family, of parents after a miscarriage, of various means of transportation, of fields and flocks, of throats on the Feast of St. Blaise may be led by a layperson. However, the *Introduction* notes, as in the case when a

Bishop is present, if a priest or deacon is present, he would be the presider.

The ritual blessing of people, and objects, and life situations is the best kept secret of the Church and is highly underestimated in our parishes. *The Book of Blessings* offers us numerous opportunities in our parishes for the Body of Christ to gather, to give God thanks and praise, and to ask God to act in a specific way, in a particular situation.



Mr D. Todd Williamson is the Director of the Office for Divine Worship of the Archdiocese of Chicago, IL, USA. He is a teacher, speaker, author and liturgist and co-author of *Guide for Celebrating Blessings* (Chicago: LTP, 2022).

SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

Blessings: Pastoral Opportunities Today

As part of our Christian discipleship, we bless and thank God for the gifts we have received. We also implore God's blessing on various people, occasions, objects and events so these will be a source of God's blessing and favour for others.

To optimise good practice when using the Church's *Book of Blessings* (1989), it is helpful to appreciate again its rich contents and to identify times and seasons when Blessings might be employed: for example, Blessing of the Advent Wreath, Christmas Tree, Nativity Scene, ashes on Ash Wednesday (especially useful in schools), and at the cemetery during early November when the Church honours All Saints and commemorates all the faithful departed.

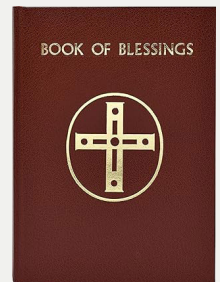
In addition, there are blessings for people being honoured in special ways: for example, commissioning Ministers of the Word, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Altar Servers, Sacristans, Musicians, Ushers. For engaged couples prior to Marriage, parents of newborn children, Mother's Day (second Sunday in May) and Fathers' Day (first Sunday in September) - blessings are provided. Blessings are also provided for the sick and elderly in their homes, for students and teachers in schools, and for those attending a meeting.

For parishes, in particular, there are Blessings for a new Pastor, those who exercise Pastoral Service and the Parish Council (these are especially relevant

in a post-Plenary Council and Synodal Church context). There are also less common occasions such as the blessing of athletic events. Importantly, in this era with fewer priests available to lead prayer, the *Book of Blessings* provides ritual forms for use by the ordained, religious and laity.

The blessing ritual comprises an Introduction, Reading of the Word of God, Intercessions, Prayer of Blessing and Conclusion. This format can provide a model for other occasions of prayer (e.g. at parish/school meetings). With so many well-prepared Blessing liturgies in the *Book of Blessings*, there is no need to reinvent wheels, and there is scope for choice in the selection of readings, intercessions and prayers, according to context.

The comprehensive indices help users find the right blessing for the right occasion - itself a rich blessing.



Dr Paul Taylor is Assistant Director, ACU Centre for Liturgy and Organist and Director of Music at Sacred Heart Cathedral, Bendigo, VIC.

Engage our expertise

Online training programs for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and Ministers of the Word

The ACU Centre for Liturgy's online training programs for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and Ministers of the Word are innovative and comprehensive short programs incorporating live Zoom classes, extensive online learning resources, interaction with your parish priest and a local practicum to prepare you well for these special liturgical ministries. These rich and engaging programs are run multiple times a year and are supported by the Bishops Commission for Liturgy. Visit acu.edu.au/centreforliturgy for future dates and enrolment.

Parish training and formation workshops

ACU Centre for Liturgy offers a variety of in-person specialised training and formation workshops for parish ministers and liturgical musicians. We can also provide detailed advice and specific strategies to improve liturgical celebrations in your parish through a comprehensive liturgy or liturgical music audit.

Professional development for teachers and religious education leaders

We tailor workshops and professional development sessions for schools and Catholic education offices to extend knowledge of liturgical celebrations and sacramental preparation.

Develop your skills as a presider at liturgy

Clergy can engage in our specialised professional development sessions on a range of topics from presidential singing to the art of presiding at worship and to the craft of preaching.

Bring our experts to you

Our academics and specialists are available to deliver keynote addresses, public lectures and conference workshops designed to meet the needs of your organisation or event.

Study liturgy and sacramental theology

You can study academic courses or undertake higher degree research in liturgical studies and sacramental theology through ACU's Faculty of Theology and Philosophy. Contact us at CentreforLiturgy@acu.edu.au for further information.

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The Liturgy Nexus

The Liturgy Nexus is an online subscription-based closed network run by the ACU Centre for Liturgy and designed for conversation on liturgical issues, resource sharing and problem solving. The Liturgy Nexus links postgraduate-qualified liturgists, current students of liturgy and those working in a liturgy-related profession, such as liturgical architecture, art or music. Membership is granted to applicants who meet the eligibility criteria. To apply for membership or associate membership, depending on your qualification level, visit our website. Membership costs \$30 per year (not pro-rata), renewable on or before 1 March each year.



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