

“The root of any blessings is the faithful person’s intention to say a good word on God’s behalf about a beloved part of God’s creation.” So explains Roy G. Pollina, rector of St. Michael’s Episcopal Church in Mandeville, LA in his book, “To Bless a Child.”

This is a wonderful little book (under 50 pages) that encourages parents and grandparents in a deeply spiritual and faith-building practice of regularly blessing their children. Roy explains in the introduction that his purpose is to show that the act of blessing a child is not reserved just for the church—but something that strengthens families and empowers children! A powerful purpose for such a little book.

In addition to establishing the importance of such a practice, Roy also instructs on how to compose a blessing, reassuring that it’s not as difficult as one may think. He lays out the following five steps:

The Purpose: Before you bless, decide the intention of your blessing. Be clear what blessing you want to claim. Safe travel? A great start to school? Protection from mischief?

The Person of the Trinity: A blessing can call upon God in God’s holy unity or in the name of any one of the three Persons that make up the Trinity.

The Attribution: Seek to attribute an appropriate characteristic of God to the intention of your blessing. “Almighty God,” “Caring Father,” “Gentle Savior” or “Holy Spirit of Health and Comfort” for instance.

The Memorial: Remember some mighty act of God that resonates with the purpose of your blessing. A birthday blessing, for instance, might recall the birth of the Christ Child.

The Conclusion: Conclude by praising God and allowing for others to affirm the blessing with an “Amen.”

There is a chapter with very specific lists of suggestions for each of these five aspects of the blessing (great to “mix and match”) and concludes with instruction that the five “steps” don’t necessarily have to fall in order. Here is a blessing that Roy includes to illustrate:

Loving (Attribution) Jesus (Person of the Trinity), you are the good and faithful Shepherd (Memorial). Watch over this child every day (Purpose). In your name, we

pray, Amen (Conclusion).

The chapter on “More than Words” conveys that we often communicate better (or additionally) in other ways—like with small gestures and through body language and expression. He suggests that when blessing a child, a gentle hand on the child’s head or shoulder or the tracing of a cross on the child’s forehead are the spiritual equivalents of a loving hug.

Rev. Pollina is clear that a blessing is not magic—that “God is not compelled by words of blessing as if they were words of a magic spell, but God has promised to hear the prayer of a faithful person to bless abundantly.” My favorite observation of his comes near the end of the book where he writes, “When parents bless their child, they are making manifest in the physical world that which is already happening spiritually.” Amen.

To Bless a Child by Roy G. Pollina is illustrated by Dorothy Perez, and is published by Morehouse Education Resources, a division of Church Publishing Incorporated, 2009.

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