

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Bless This House

Can you please give me a blessing, Father?" I've lost count of how many times people have asked me that question at the front door of the church following Mass. Sometimes I'll laugh and try to tell them that, hey, they just GOT a blessing, at the conclusion of the liturgy—and, oh, by the way, I'm not a priest. But truth be told, I'm happy to oblige. Getting a blessing is, for many, like a B12 shot—a word of encouragement to sanctify the middle of an ordinary day. It's like asking God to give them that extra dose of grace. Who doesn't need that?

Once in a while, the blessing extends not just to people, but to a wide array of objects: rosaries, holy medals, statues, crosses, even cars and condominiums. In fact, these days after Easter are considered by the Church to be most appropriate for the blessing of houses.

I've done several of these blessings, under differing circumstances; there have been people who are seriously, intently looking forward to it, and make it a priority in a new home as soon as the boxes are unpacked and the casserole dishes put away. You also find people who feel a house isn't a home until it's been blessed.

Once in a while, some people suspect that "evil spirits" are lurking from the former residents—did things go badly at closing? I try to tell them, gently, that blessing a house has nothing to do with superstition.

But whatever compels people to ask for these blessings, there is in every case a strong desire to make something old *new*. Especially now, in the weeks following Easter, we want to feel a part of the rebirth that is happening in our Church, and in our world. As a result of the newly initiated and freshly baptized, the Church is full of new life. Many of the rest of us have taken advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the days leading up to Easter. And outside the church doors, leaves are returning, grass is growing, flowers are blooming. You can't escape the sense that *life* is happening. The tomb is empty, and the dead earth is bringing forth buds.

We want the blessings of all that to extend everywhere. There is something within us that cries out to have our lives, our loved ones, the shelters built around us *sanctified*. We have become new creations.

The ritual for the blessing of a house is simple, but lovely. It can include a variety of readings and responses, even singing. The whole blessing takes just a few minutes. But it can be transformative. I've never encountered a family that didn't express profound gratitude and feel that, yes, these few moments made a difference.

The opening prayer of the house blessing sets the tone:

"When Christ took flesh through the Blessed Virgin Mary, he made his home with us. Let us now pray that he will enter this home and bless it with His presence. May He always be here among you; may He nurture your love for each other, share in your joy, and comfort you in your sorrows. Inspired by His teaching and example, seek to make your new home before all else a dwelling place of love, diffusing far and wide the goodness of Christ."

Finally, the prayer of blessing itself calls forth the continuing consoling presence of God—a presence we all yearn for, pray for, hope for, no matter what our circumstances in life.

I offer it here as a Benediction to all who hunger for God to be a part of their lives—all who want to reconnect with their faith, and feel renewed by the heart-lifting, heart-stopping grace of this holy season. Easter affirms something wonderful, and the Blessing of Houses underscores it: God will stay near to us, if we stay near to Him.

Let these few simple words, then, be a start.

*Lord,
be close to your servants,
who ask for your blessing.
Be their shelter when they are at home,
Their companion when they are away,
And their welcome guest when they return.
And at last receive them
Into the dwelling place you have prepared for them
In your Father's house,
Where you live forever and ever.
Amen.*

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