



Orantes

Newsletter of the Office for Divine Worship
of the Diocese of Worcester

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ON BLESSINGS

The question of blessings in the life of the Church is an important one, which has evolved significantly in our lifetime.

In 1984, the revised Latin edition of *De Benedictionibus* was issued, published in English under the title *Book of Blessings* in 1989. The liturgical book reflects two significant shifts in the theology and form of blessings from the pre-conciliar editions. First, blessings are conveyed primarily upon persons rather than things or places. Second, as liturgical texts, blessings are always to be preferred in a setting allowing for proclamation of the word of God and communal participation. Many bishops and liturgists over the past thirty-five years have expressed reservations with this approach and has urged the Holy See to issue an *editio typica altera*.¹

¹ Cf. Theologies of Blessing: Origins and Characteristics of *De Benedictionibus*, *Antiphon* 15.1 (2011): 27-46.

“*Fiducia
Supplicans: On
the Pastoral
Meaning of
Blessings*, which
introduces a new
category and form
of ‘non-ritualized’
blessings”

In 2002, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued a decree mandating that all blessings given by a priest or deacon include a sign of the Cross at the word “bless” or at the conclusion of the prayer, if the word is missing.² This practice has been incorporated into all subsequent liturgical books, including the third edition of the *Roman Missal*.

Most recently, on 18 December 2023, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a declaration under the title *Fiducia Supplicans: On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings*, which introduces a new category and form of “non-ritualized” blessings.

This issue of *Orantes* provides three resources to assist our readers in deepening their understanding of blessings.

Providing a foundation to the understanding of the theology and practice of blessing in the Roman Rite are excerpts from the “General Introduction to the *Book of Blessings*” (page 3);

This is followed by a description of the new form of blessing introduced by the declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* (page 11);

Finally, five questions and answers on *Fiducia Supplicans* and its proper use by parish priests is provided (page 14).

As with all issues of *Orantes*, we are grateful to Bishop McManus who as the guardian of the liturgical life of the Diocese has closely reviewed its contents. It is my hope that this issue will assist priests in carefully implementing the guidance and cautions of the declaration in their pastoral ministry.

² Prot. N. 1745/02/L (14 September 2002), AAS 94 (2002) 684.

General Introduction to the *Book of Blessings*

I. BLESSINGS IN THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

1 The source from whom every good gift comes³ is God who is above all, blessed for ever.⁴ He who is all good has made all things good, so that he might fill his creatures with blessings⁵ and even after the Fall he has continued his blessings as a sign of his merciful love.



2 But when the fullness of time arrived, the Father sent his own Son and through him, who took our flesh, gave us a new gift in every spiritual blessing.⁶ The ancient curse upon us was thus changed into a blessing: when "the glorious Sun of Justice, Christ our God, appeared, he freed us from the age-old curse and filled us with holiness."⁷

3 Christ, the Father's supreme blessing upon us, is portrayed in the gospel as blessing those he encountered, especially the children,⁸ and as offering to his Father prayers of blessing.⁹ Glorified by the Father after his ascension, Christ sent the gift of his Spirit upon the brothers and sisters he had gained at the cost of his blood. The power of the Spirit would enable them to offer the Father always and everywhere praise, adoration, and thanksgiving and, through the works of charity, to be numbered among the blessed in the Father's

³ See *Roman Missal*, Solemn Blessing no. 3, Beginning of the New Year.

⁴ See Romans 9:5.

⁵ See *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer IV, Preface.

⁶ See Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 1 :3.

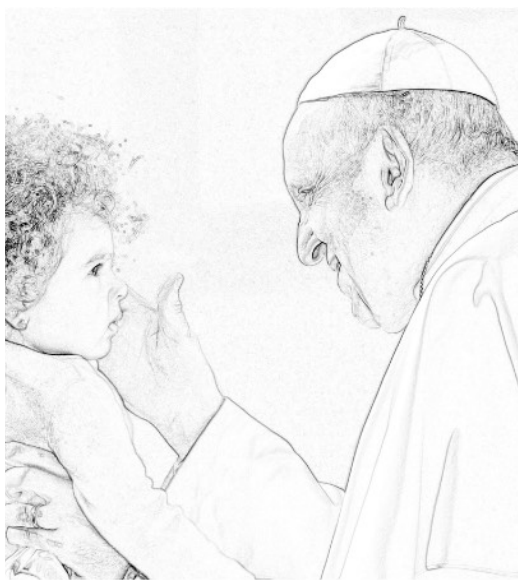
⁷ See *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Birthday of Mary, 8 September, antiphon for the Cantic of Zechariah.

⁸ See Acts 3:26; Mark 10:16, 6:41; Luke 24:50, etc.

⁹ See Matthew 9:31, 14:19, 26:26; Mark 6:41, 8:7 and 9, 14:22; Luke 9:16, 24:30; John 6:11.

kingdom.¹⁰

4 In Christ the blessing of God upon Abraham¹¹ reached its complete fulfillment. Through the Spirit sent by Christ, those who are called to a new life are “showered with every blessing.”¹² become children by adoption and so as members of Christ's Body spread the fruits of the same Spirit in order to bring God's healing blessings to the world.



5 In anticipation of Christ's coming as Savior, the Father had reaffirmed his original covenant of love toward us by the outpouring of many gifts. Thus he prepared a Chosen People to welcome the Redeemer and he intervened to make them ever more worthy of the covenant. By walking in the path of righteousness, they had the power to honor God with their lips and with their hearts and thus to become before the world a sign and sacrament of divine blessings.

6 The God from whom all blessings flow favored many persons, particularly the patriarchs, kings, priests, Levites, and parents,¹³ by allowing them to offer blessings in praise of his name and to invoke his name, so that other persons or the works of creation would be showered with divine blessings.

Whether God blessed the people himself or through the ministry of those who acted in his name, his blessing was always a promise of divine help, a proclamation of his favor, a reassurance of his

¹⁰ See *Roman Missal*, Common of Holy Men and Women, 9: For those who work for the under-privileged, Opening Prayer.

¹¹ See Genesis 12:3.

¹² Basil the Great, *De Spiritu Santo*, cap. 15, 36: PG 32, 131. See Ambrose, *De Spiritu Santo*, I, 7, 89: PL 16, 755; CSEL 79, 53.

¹³ See Genesis 14:19-20; Hebrews 7:1; Genesis 27:27-29, 38, 40; Hebrews 11:20; Genesis 49:1-28; Hebrews 11:21; Deuteronomy 21:5; Deuteronomy 33; Joshua 14:13, 22:6; 2 Chronicles 30:27; Leviticus 9:22-23; Nehemiah 8:6; Sirach 3:9-11.

faithfulness to the covenant he had made with his people. When, in turn, others uttered blessings, they were offering praise to the one whose goodness and mercy they were proclaiming.

In a word, God bestows his blessing by communicating or declaring his own goodness; his ministers bless God by praising him and thanking him and by offering him their reverent worship and service. Whoever blesses others in God's name invokes the divine help upon individuals or upon an assembled people.



7 Scripture attests that all the beings God has created and keeps in existence¹⁴ by his gracious goodness declare themselves to be blessings from him and should move us to bless him in return. This is above all true after the Word made flesh came to make all things holy by the mystery of his incarnation.

Blessings therefore refer first and foremost to God, whose majesty and goodness they extol, and, since they indicate the communication of God's favor, they also involve human beings whom he governs and in his providence protects. Further, blessings apply to other created things through which, in their abundance and variety, God blesses human beings.¹⁵

II. BLESSINGS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

8 Taught by the Savior's own command, the Church shares the cup of blessing,¹⁶ as she gives thanks for the inexpressible gift received first in Christ's Paschal Mystery and then brought to us in the Eucharist. From the grace and power received in

¹⁴ See, for example, Daniel 3:57-88; Psalm 66:8; Psalm 103; Psalm 135; 1 Timothy 4:4-5.

¹⁵ See Genesis 27:27; Exodus 23:25; Deuteronomy 7:13, 28:12; Job 1:10; Psalm 65:11; Jeremiah 31:23.

¹⁶ See 1 Corinthians 10:16.

the Eucharist the Church herself becomes a blessing existing in the world. The Church as the universal sacrament of salvation¹⁷ continues the work of sanctifying and in the Holy Spirit joins Christ its Head in giving glory to the Father.

9 As the Church, through the working of the Holy Spirit, fulfills her many-sided ministry of sanctifying, she has accordingly established many forms of blessing. Through them she calls us to praise God, encourages us to implore his protection, exhorts us to seek his mercy by our holiness of life, and provides us with ways of praying that God will grant the favors we ask.

The blessings instituted by the Church are included among those signs perceptible to the senses by which human sanctification in Christ and the glorification of God are “signified and brought about in ways proper to each of these signs.”¹⁸ Human sanctification and God's glorification are the ends toward which all the Church's other activities are directed.¹⁹

10 Blessings are signs that have God's word as their basis and that are celebrated from motives of faith. They are therefore meant to declare and to manifest the newness of life in Christ that has its origin and growth in the sacraments of the New Covenant established by the Lord. In addition, since they have been established as a kind of imitation of the sacraments, blessings are signs above all of spiritual effects that are achieved through the Church's intercession.²⁰



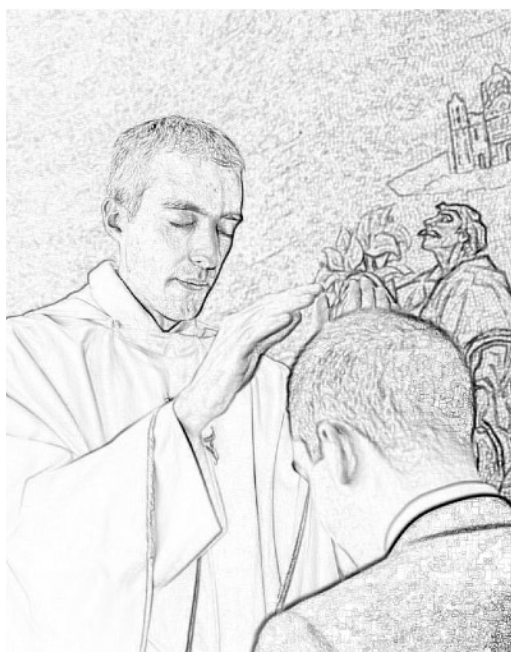
¹⁷ See Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 48.

¹⁸ Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (hereafter SC), art 7.

¹⁹ SC, art. 7 and 10.

²⁰ See SC, art. 60.

11 Because of these considerations, the Church has a profound concern that the celebration of blessings should truly contribute to God's praise and glory and should serve to better God's people. In order that this intent of the Church might stand out more clearly, blessing formularies have, from age old tradition, centered above all on glorifying God for his gifts, on imploring favors from him, and on restraining the power of evil in this world.



12 The Church gives glory to God in all things and is particularly intent on showing forth his glory to those who have been or will be reborn through his grace. For them and with them therefore the Church in celebrating its blessings praises the Lord and implores divine grace at important moments in the life of her members. At times the Church also invokes blessings on objects and places connected with human occupations or activities and those related to the liturgy or to piety and popular devotions. But such blessings are invoked always with a view to the people who use the objects to be blessed and frequent the places to be blessed. God has given into our use and care the good things he has created, and we are also the recipients of his own wisdom. Thus the celebration of blessings becomes the means for us to profess that as we make use of what God has created, we wish to find him and to love and serve him with all fidelity.

13 Through the guidance of faith, the assurance of hope, and the inspiration of charity, the faithful receive the wisdom to discern the reflections of God's goodness not only in the elements of creation but also in the events of human life. They see all of these as signs of that fatherly providence by which God guides and governs all things. At all times and in every situation, then, the faithful have an occasion for praising God through Christ in the Holy Spirit, for calling on divine help, and for giving thanks in all things, provided there is

nothing that conflicts with the letter and spirit of the Gospel. Therefore every celebration of a blessing must be weighed beforehand with pastoral prudence, particularly if there is any danger of scandalizing and confusing the faithful or other persons.

14 This pastoral evaluation of the blessings of creation is in keeping with another text of Vatican Council II: “Thus, for well-disposed members of the faithful, the effect of the liturgy of the sacraments and the sacramentals is that almost every event in their lives is made holy by divine grace that flows from the paschal mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, the fount from which all the sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. The liturgy means also that there is hardly any proper use of material things that cannot thus be directed toward human sanctification and the praise of God.”²¹

The celebration of a blessing, then, prepares us to receive the chief effect of the sacraments and makes holy the various situations of human life.

15 “But in order that the liturgy may possess its full effectiveness, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions.”²² When through the Church we ask for God's blessing, we should intensify our personal dispositions through faith, for which all things are possible;²³ we should place our assurance in the hope that does not disappoint;²⁴ above all we should be inspired by the love that impels us to keep God's commandments.²⁵



²¹ SC, art. 61.

²² SC, art. 11.

²³ See Mark 9:23.

²⁴ See Romans 5:5.

²⁵ See John 14:21.

Then, seeking what is pleasing to God,²⁶ we will fully appreciate his blessing and will surely receive it.

III. OFFICES AND MINISTRIES

16 Blessings are a part of the liturgy of the Church. Therefore their communal celebration is in some cases obligatory but in all cases more in accord with the character of liturgical prayer; as the Church's prayer places truth before the minds of the faithful, those who are present are led to join themselves with heart and voice to the voice of the Church.

For the more important blessings that concern the local Church, it is fitting that the diocesan or parish community assemble, with the bishop or pastor (parish priest) presiding, to celebrate the blessing.

Even in the case of other blessings, the presence of an assembly of the faithful is preferable, since what is done on behalf of any group within the community redounds in some way to the good of the entire community.

17 Whenever there is no assembly of the faithful for the celebration, the person who wishes to bless God's name or to ask God's favor and the minister who presides should still keep in mind that they represent the Church in celebration. In this way from their shared prayer and petition, a blessing results that "although a human being pronounces it, does not have a merely human source,"²⁷ a blessing that is "the longed-for bestowal of sanctification and divine favor."²⁸



²⁶ See Romans 12:2; Ephesians 5:17; Matthew 12:50; Mark 3:35.

²⁷ Caesarius of Aries, *Serm.* 77, 5: CCL 103, 321.

²⁸ Ambrose, *De benedictionibus patriarcharum* 2, 7: PL 14, 709; CSEL, *De Patriarchis*, 32, 2, 18.

The celebration of the blessing of things or places according to custom should not take place without the participation of at least some of the faithful.



A New Kind of Blessing

In order to provide for the blessing of persons in irregular unions, the declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* creates an entirely new category of “non-ritualized” blessing.

The declaration prohibits the offering of “any type of liturgical rite or blessing similar to a liturgical rite”²⁹ to those in irregular unions, stating that such a blessing would compromise “the traditional doctrine of the Church about marriage.”³⁰

However, the newly created category of “non-ritualized” blessing, prayed in the priest’s own words, may be used to bless couples in irregular unions.

This new type of “non-ritualized blessing” is proposed as “a broadening and enrichment of the classical understanding of blessings...based on the pastoral vision of Pope Francis.”³¹ Its aim is to provide a form for the “blessing of couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church’s perennial teaching on marriage.”³²

The introduction of this new type of blessing introduces two major changes to the idea of blessings, as articulated, up until now, by the General Introduction to the *Book of Blessings*.

This new type of “non-ritualized blessing” is proposed as “a broadening and enrichment of the classical understanding of blessings...based on the pastoral vision of Pope Francis.”

²⁹ FS, introduction.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

“This new, non-liturgical blessing, however, is given without any moral ‘precondition for conferring it.’”

First, up until now, all blessings have been seen as “a part of the liturgy of the Church,”³³ and should, as far as possible, include the proclamation of the word of God and the participation of the faithful. As a liturgical act, their essential meaning is rooted in the proclamation of the praise of God.

As liturgical blessings, they also require that “what is blessed be conformed to God’s will, as expressed in the teachings of the Church,”³⁴ For, in the words of the Council Fathers, “in order that the liturgy may possess its full effectiveness, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions.”³⁵

Because this new type of blessing is not a liturgical act, it is spontaneously composed and not drawn from a prescribed text or ritual expression. No “Diocese, Bishops’ Conference, or any other ecclesial structure [is authorized to]...establish procedures or rituals” for such blessings. The blessing is to be simple and spontaneously offered “in a realm of greater spontaneity and freedom”³⁶ “expressing a petition for God’s assistance, a plea to live better, and confidence in a Father who can help us live better.”³⁷

In addition, a “non-liturgical blessing,” may be given without any moral “precondition for

³³ Book of Blessings, no. 16.

³⁴ FS, no. 9.

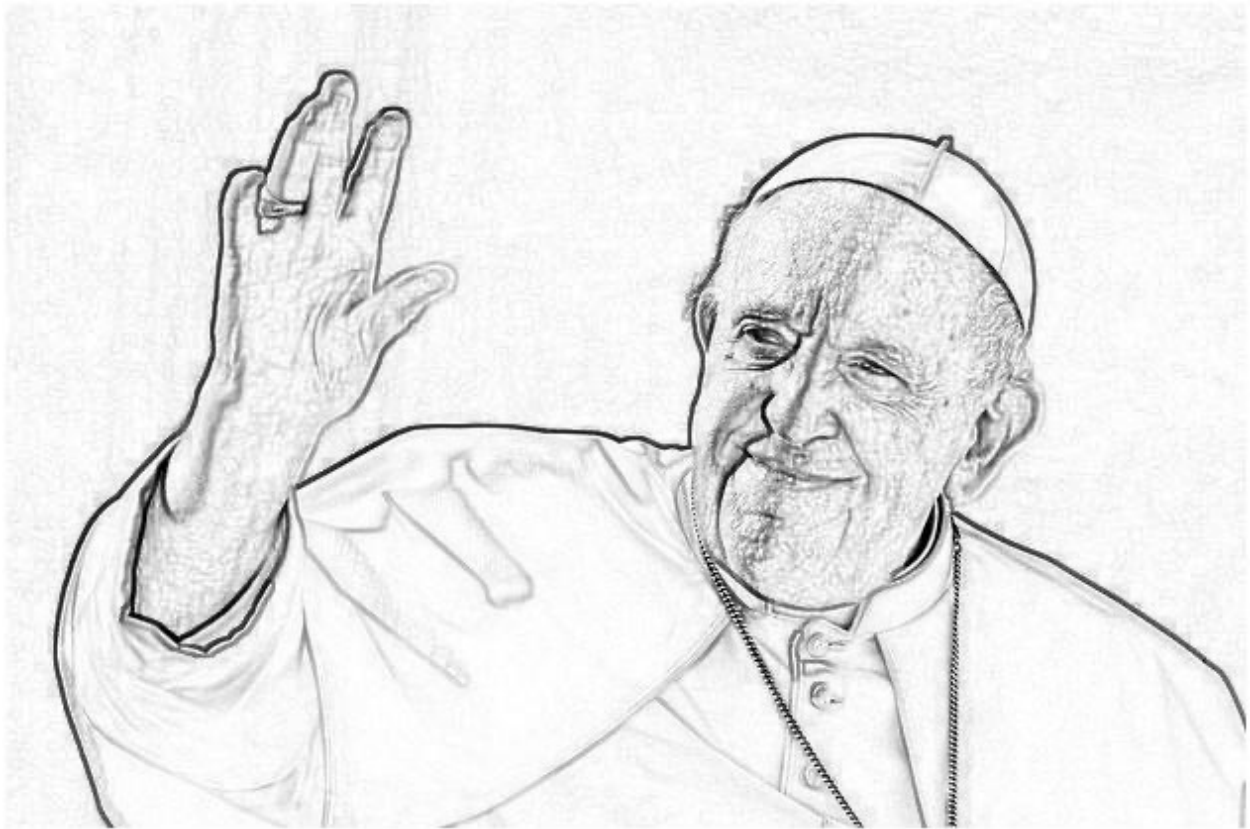
³⁵ SC, art. 11.

³⁶ FS, no. 23.

³⁷ FS, no. 21.

conferring it.”³⁸ Such a blessing is simply “offered to all without requiring anything.”³⁹

Thus, *Fiducia Supplicans* establishes an entirely new category of blessing to be offered by the priest in his own words as an act of devotion⁴⁰ in the simple “language, rhythm, course, and theological emphasis”⁴¹ of popular piety.



³⁸ FS, no. 25.

³⁹ FS, no. 27.

⁴⁰ Cf. FS, no. 24.

⁴¹ FS, no. 24.

Five Questions on *Fiducia Supplicans*

The declaration has
“no intention to
legitimize anything.”

“the Church does not
have the power to
confer its liturgical
blessing when that
would somehow
offer a form of moral
legitimacy to a union
that presumes to be a
marriage or to an
extra-marital sexual
practice.”

1. Does the declaration authorize the blessing of same sex unions or “second marriages”?

No. The declaration explicitly states that it has “no intention to legitimize anything.”⁴² It simply gives permission for priests to bless same-sex couples or those in other irregular unions by use of a spontaneously offered “non-ritualized blessing,” in order to “ask for [God’s] help to live better, and also to invoke the Holy Spirit so that the values of the Gospel may be lived with greater faithfulness.”⁴³

2. Is this “non-ritualized blessing” a liturgical or sacramental act?

No. The declaration states explicitly that because a liturgical blessing “requires that what is blessed be conformed to God’s will, as expressed in the teachings of the Church,”⁴⁴ it cannot, therefore, be imparted on someone in an irregular union or who has attempted to enter into a same-sex union. Because both relationships are objectively sinful and “the Church has always considered only those sexual relations that are lived out within marriage to be morally licit, the Church does not have the power to confer its liturgical blessing when that would somehow offer a form of moral legitimacy to a union that

⁴² *Fiducia Supplicans* [FS], no. 40.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ FS, no. 9.

“The prayer should ask ‘that the individuals have peace, health, a spirit of patience, dialogue, and mutual assistance—but also God’s light and strength to be able to fulfill his will completely.’”

presumes to be a marriage or to an extra-marital sexual practice.”⁴⁵

3. What is a “non-ritualized blessing”?

The declaration describes such a blessing as a “simple gesture,” spontaneously offered by a priest and intended as “an effective means of increasing trust in God” to those requesting it.⁴⁶ Because this blessing is seen as a spontaneous “act of popular piety,” rather than a liturgical act,⁴⁷ no ritual text is provided.⁴⁸ Indeed, the declaration repeatedly counsels that any semblance to a liturgical act should be avoided. Therefore, it may never be given in connection with a civil union, or with “any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding.”⁴⁹

4. What words may be used by a priest imparting such a blessing?

The blessing is to be spontaneously offered and should be simple and brief.⁵⁰ The prayer should ask “that the individuals have peace, health, a spirit of patience, dialogue, and mutual assistance—but also God’s light and strength to be able to fulfill his will completely.”⁵¹

Under no circumstances may the priest imply “a legitimization of [the couple’s] status, but [should] beg that all that is true, good, and

⁴⁵ FS, no. 11.

⁴⁶ Cf. FS, no. 36.

⁴⁷ FS, no. 33.

⁴⁸ FS, no. 31.

⁴⁹ FS, no. 39.

⁵⁰ FS, no. 38.

⁵¹ FS, no. 38.

“that when priests impart such blessings, they do not to imply that they are blessing civil unions, nor celebrating a liturgical act on behalf of the Church.”

humanly valid in their lives and their relationships be enriched, healed, and elevated by the presence of the Holy Spirit.”⁵² The prayer should also ask that the individuals “may be freed from their imperfections and frailties, and that they may express themselves in the ever-increasing dimension of the divine love.”⁵³

5. Is the permission of the Bishop required to give such a blessing?

No. However, priests are obliged to follow the guidance of the Bishop, as “moderator, promoter, and guardian of the whole liturgical life of the particular Church entrusted to him,”⁵⁴ whose responsibility it is to assure that when priests impart such blessings, they do not to imply that they are blessing civil unions, nor celebrating a liturgical act on behalf of the Church. Therefore, since the declaration clearly emphasizes that the request for a blessing and the response of the priest to do so are to be “spontaneous,” there should not be present any media or witnesses that suggest a pre-arranged gathering.

⁵² FS, no. 31.

⁵³ FD, no. 31.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Traditionis custodes*, art. 2.

Diocesan Prayer for Eucharistic Revival



Lord Jesus Christ,
who by the gift of your Body and Blood,
are really present in our lives,
hear the prayers of the Church in Worcester.

Give us the faith of your Church, confident
in your presence in our Masses, our
tabernacles and our lives.

Give us the faith
to offer our lives to you,
joined with the perfect sacrifice,
which you offered on the altar of the Cross.

Good and loving Shepherd,
teach us how to lead your children home,
that we might long together
to glorify your name
at the Supper of the Lord.

For you are Lord, forever and ever. Amen.

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