

The Sacrament of Blessing in the Community of Christ Presentation of Four Lessons from Temple School Class PA 222

By Velma Ruch

Introduction

I felt honored a few months ago when Richard Kohlman called me and asked if I would participate in this class today. At my age of 87, one isn't often asked to take on such an important assignment, particularly in my situation because I have a profound hearing loss. I reminded Rich of that but told him if I could have someone like Edith Gallaher assist me for the discussion I thought I could manage. He agreed to that. Edith has worked with me before, and she has come all the way from Virginia, both to be of help to me and the class. I am deeply appreciative of that.

The four chapters assigned to me: "The Sacrament of Blessing," "The Language of Blessing," "The Technique of Blessing," and "The Order of Evangelists," are exactly the chapters I would have chosen had I had a choice. Working on them all, particularly "The Language of Blessing," has been very exciting for me. I finished the first draft of my presentation weeks ago but I couldn't leave it alone because new ideas kept coming to me. Perhaps all the rest of the participants in this class have had a similar experience. I think having all of us involved in this way thinking about the meaning of our calling has been good for the order. I believe it will enhance our ministry in the days to come.

For me the whole process has been one of rethinking my spiritual journey and how my scholarship and various callings have been related to that. Since this is so, it is inevitable that part of my life story will be involved in this presentation. My story will not be like yours, but it may well remind you of your own.

I have 1½ hours for my presentation. It will take most of the first hour to discuss the sacrament of blessing and the language of blessing. Edith will take it from there and use what is left of the first hour and the next twenty minutes for your questions and comments, particularly about the technique of blessing. That will leave ten minutes at the end for "The Order of Evangelists." I wrote most of the pages about that in your book, but I have

condensed the discussion to ten minutes. Let us begin with the sacrament of blessing and how I have experienced it.

The Sacrament of Blessing

I had my first “patriarchal blessing” in the Stone Church when I was seven years old. Of course, I was too young and the blessing I received that day didn’t have a special name. What had happened was that in 1927, after spending five years in Scandinavia, my parents and I returned to Independence for a few months. During those few months I attended first grade at the old Columbian school in Independence. The Saints had been particularly kind to us during that time. Now, when we were preparing to return to Norway for what became seven more years, they wanted to have a service of blessing for us at the Stone Church. In that service we were not blessed just as a family, but each of us received an individual blessing, even a seven-year old little girl.

The one who gave me my blessing was a church legend, Elbert A. Smith. In 1928 he was a member of the First Presidency, but ten years later he became presiding evangelist and served in that position for twenty years.

I shall never forget the prayer he offered for me that day. I was told that though I was facing the challenge of different cultures, different languages and different schools that I would have no trouble because I would be supported every step, and the entire experience would be of special significance in my life. That blessing was fulfilled in ways that were nothing short of miraculous. Can you imagine the effect on a seven-year-old girl being considered important enough to have one of the most beloved ministers of the church give her a blessing like that? It influenced my life in ways that are beyond telling.

Interestingly, in the congregation that day were two ten-year-old girls, twins Eleanor and Dorothy Fairbanks, later Eleanor Stuart and Dorothy Evans. Eventually, J.C. Stuart became pastor at Graceland, and the Stuart and Evans families became my second family. Eleanor and Dorothy often told me how well they remembered that day in the Stone Church and how it affected them. They even remembered the color of the dress I wore. Red. Even I don’t remember that.

We returned to the United States when I was fifteen years old, old enough according to the rules to have a real patriarchal blessing. We were

living in a house at 127 S. Crysler. The house temporarily was furnished by gifts from our members. We lived there from January to June 1936 before my father was assigned as pastor in Tulsa. While in Independence I attended the second semester of the ninth grade while making up the first semester pretty much on my own and relearning the English language, even having spelling lessons in the principal's office every morning before school. It was then that some of the blessings promised me seven years before were miraculously fulfilled. It was in the living room of 127 S. Crysler that my "official patriarchal blessing" took place.

It was given by Richard Baldwin, his 1,109th blessing. That is how it was in the old days. My parents were present for my blessing, and it was a powerful experience. My mother told of seeing the Holy Spirit as angels surrounded us. The line from the blessing that will always be special for me was, "The Lord loves and cherishes you, dear child." That line in its many variations has appeared in every blessing I have given. I feel there is nothing more important we can do in a blessing, this conversation of Christ with his children, than to assure them that God's unconditional love always will enfold them.

I have told of these two blessings because in our experiences in life we are led to seek for understanding of what it all means. It is faith seeking understanding. Our greatest learning experiences about the Holy Spirit tend to come through worship, particularly the sacraments. We wonder, "What is so special about a sacrament?" There could be many answers, but primarily it is a rite initiated by the church in remembrance of a self-giving and self-revealing God who so "loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoso believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Love is not just one of many characteristics of God, but as John tells us, "God *is* love." Love is the very nature of God, and every sacrament we celebrate is an invitation to truly come home to share in that love. But the invitation comes with an R.S.V. P, respond if you will. Our response is oblation, a giving of ourselves to God in return.

In 1995 at the Aaronic Priesthood Temple Event, Everett Graffeo gave one of the finest talks I have ever heard on the nature of oblation. We tend to associate oblation with the money we give on Communion Sundays to help the poor, but it is ever so much more than that. As Everett explained it, the meaning of oblation is found in the life and ministry of Jesus. He is

the oblation of God. When Jesus said his last words on the cross, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,” he was giving all that he was and placing it in God’s hands that God’s will might be done. “Thus oblation,” Everett continued, “is the response to the Spirit of God calling and leading people to give themselves for the sake of God’s world ... It is an announcement of a promise. It announces that love gives itself for others, that hope and faith are vindicated, and that history’s final destiny has been graciously fixed in Christ. So in response, oblation is placing into God’s hands all that we are. We say along with Christ ‘Into your hands we commend our spirits for the sake of your world.’”

These words apply to all the sacraments, but I believe they have a special significance for the Evangelist’s Blessing.

Some have wondered why the evangelist’s blessing should be considered a sacrament. As far as I am concerned it is one of the most meaningful sacraments. Such a blessing as practiced in Community of Christ is unique among Christian churches. The very availability of the blessing is an affirmation of the worth of the individual, a recognition that God knows us by name and is willing to affirm that caring love through an evangelist’s blessing.

In a recent letter Dick Young wrote to me, he defined blessing as “intimacy with God.” I like that. I like that even better than the phrase from St. Lawrence “practicing the presence.” Though God’s presence is in all of us, is there any joy greater than to have genuine contact with that presence? Only then can we know what the love of God really means. Only then is it possible for us to love in return. It is God’s greatest gift to us and comes in many forms.

The special thing about the evangelist’s blessing is that it is so personal. It is a specific place and time where the Holy Spirit through one of God’s servants meets us and assures us of how much we are loved and opens up new avenues of what we can become under that holy influence.

As a church we always have believed in a God of blessing. It was Paul Booth, however, during his short tenure as presiding evangelist, who alerted us to the importance of that and who essentially prepared us for the shift from the Old Testament patriarchal tradition to the New Testament affirmation that we are all part of the family of Christ. This shift was

reflected in the name of the blessing from “patriarchal blessing” to “evangelist’s blessing.” It was a greater shift in thinking than many of us were aware at the time, but the more we see blessing as “intimacy with God” the more we appreciate what it means to be part of the family of Christ. Whether we are seven years old or eighty-seven, we can, as part of Christ’s family, present ourselves for a blessing all our own.

The minister who speaks for God in that sacred moment is not only God’s representative but represents the community that has a stake in what this individual becomes. Though the evangelist and the person receiving the blessing may be the only two persons physically present, they are surrounded by the great community of saints, living and dead, whose heritage continues to sustain and bless. Is it any wonder that an evangelist’s blessing is a centerpiece of the office of evangelist? What a privilege we have as evangelists to be part of that wonder.

There is much more we could say about this but let us turn to the language of blessing.

The Language of Blessing

As I started working on the lessons assigned to me I became particularly fascinated with the one called “The Language of Blessing.” I guess that is not surprising because I have spent a good deal of my life dealing with questions involving language. This time I was particularly interested in the interrelationship of human language and divine language and how we can distinguish one from the other. Let us start with daily language as we know it.

Scientists tell us that children’s minds are wired to learn language. Everett told about his daughter, Julie, in the article in your book. I can imagine that David and Carolyn Brock’s Emily has her own story to tell, as well.

My story starts on an ocean liner on its way from New York to Oslo, Norway, when I was twenty months old. My father, before the church asked him to go under appointment, was a coal miner with an eighth-grade education. The plan was that my parents would sell their home in Huntsville, Missouri, and attend Graceland for a year in the class of Religious Education in preparation to go on a mission to Tahiti.

Because they had been married for seven years and had no children they thought they could accept that assignment. Then mother got pregnant. That is how I was born at Graceland at the beginning of the second semester, 1921. The plan for us to go to Tahiti, however, was scrapped because it so happened that year that Graceland didn't have a French teacher. But it had a Norwegian on the staff, and it seemed practical to have my parents study Norwegian and go to Norway. How different my life would have been if the original plan had worked I can only imagine.

I recently came across a daily journal that my parents kept of the twelve-day journey from New York to Oslo. It was not an easy trip. They were lonely, anxious, and seasick. On top of that they had to deal with a crying baby who also was seasick and had no idea what she was doing out there in the middle of the ocean and who kept pleading, "Take me home. Please take me home."

Eventually we arrived in Oslo, and I suddenly was surrounded by people speaking a strange language. But because children are wired for language, I absorbed Norwegian almost instantly. At the age of twenty-one months I was bilingual, and according to my mother at times I served as a translator, explaining what the Norwegians were saying to them and vice-versa. It didn't last long. I didn't want to be different so I stopped speaking English completely. During my first fifteen years I switched back and forth between Norwegian and English three times, forgetting the other language each time.

One thing I learned is that it is impossible to get an exact translation from one language to another. That became particularly clear to me when I returned to Norway on a volunteer mission for the church in 1986 after my retirement from Graceland. I was trying to teach Temple School classes for which there was no Norwegian translation. As most of you know, some words in those courses are difficult for English-speaking people to understand and almost impossible when you try to find an equivalent word in another language, particularly if there isn't such a word. Even such a simple word as "worship" had its problems in Norwegian. "Endowment," particularly as we think of it in English, was impossible.

But while I was dealing with two languages I was learning a third: the language of God. While children are wired for human language, are they also wired to respond to God's language? I believe so. For as long as I can

remember I have been fascinated with the question, “What is God’s language and how is prayer related to that?” Surely God’s language is not Norwegian or English or any other language we can think of. Marjorie Suchoki in her book, *In God’s Presence* says God’s language is all languages and none of them. It is the language of the Holy Spirit. In learning the language of God we first must learn the language of the Holy Spirit. Our feeble words in prayer, whatever they may be, are translated into the language of God and, according to Milton, ascend as incense to the one to whom we pray.

There aren’t just words in that mix; it involves the totality of our being. The words themselves do not count for as much as who we are, but however that is, we all are accepted and loved by God who created us.

There are two beliefs of the Restoration movement that can help us here. The first appears in Section 28 of Doctrine and Covenants: “Verily I say unto you, that all things unto me are spiritual” (9a). That is followed by the statement in Section 85:3a:

And the light which now shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; which light proceeded forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space.

That means the presence of God is pervasive through all creation and shines forth to all who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Though this is true, there is a difference between how that works in and through human beings and the rest of creation. We are created in God’s image with the commission to grow into God’s likeness. Part of that means that we are filled with God’s presence since before we were born. Only into human beings did God transfer his life force, his breath. In this context the Holy Spirit takes an active role in human lives. The self-consciousness of God comes in contact with the self-consciousness of the human.

In addition we were given the capacity of language so we could communicate with one another and with God. The God who created us obviously wanted to have communion with his people. We think of statements such as “I am your God, and you are my people.” And that

wonderful statement in Hosea 11:3–4 NRSV when Israel had strayed away from God’s commands and God mourns:

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love, I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down and fed them.

Can we believe in a God like that and even one who says, “Your tears are my tears”? If we do, we wonder, “How can we come in contact with such a God?” Well, the Holy Spirit has taken leadership in this connection. In theology it is referred to as “prevenient grace.” “Prevenient” means “that which comes before.” God’s presence and grace are always within us, part of our very creation. Much of the time it is subliminal, below our consciousness, but whether we recognize it or not it is responsible for the nudges we receive to learn God’s language, to respond, to pray. Because we have free will it also is possible for us to resist it. The Spirit does not compel us to respond.

A second belief of the Restoration movement is that the Divine never has ceased to speak through prophets and ordinary people. Here language enters in, and things become a little more complicated. We can believe in a presence within us, which lights up and warms us like fire. But how does that become expressed in words as in prophecy, for instance?

We gather that the revelations we have assembled in the Doctrine and Covenants didn’t necessarily come to the prophets word for word and all they had to do was write them down. What usually happened was that the thoughts came to them like a burning fire, or as President Smith once expressed it, “As light as the touch of a butterfly’s wing.” Sometimes words accompanied this experience, but most of the time they had to be “wrested” (to use Grant McMurray’s word) out of the store of language the prophet had to call upon from his own experience. In the preface to Section 162 President McMurray wrote:

The words did not flow as if dictated, but were wrested out of my own encounter with the Spirit that had been working with me these many months. I wrote, and then in subsequent days I pondered the words, recasting them here and there as further

clarification would come. Even as I present them to the church, I do so sensing that there is more to be said.

That last statement is particularly significant, “sensing that there is more to be said.” Even the best words we may have in our vocabulary never will capture the fullness of the revelatory experience. The best we have is what someone called “the ghost of a language.”

President Stephen Veazey in his introduction to Section 163 made similar comments:

The words and images that follow have been birthed through much struggle, not because of any lack of inspiration, but because of the limitations of the human vessel entrusted with the responsibility for articulating divine encounter.

But let us return to the call to evangelist which most of us share. Are we prophets? No, not the majority of us, nor do most of us have the gift of prophecy. Still, a central call of our ministry is to give evangelist’s blessings and the promise is that the Spirit will bless us in the giving. As we have seen, the blessing is one way in which God extends both love and guidance to God’s people. How can we as evangelists serve as a medium for that conversation? That very question is what strikes fear in some evangelists, and that may account for the fact that many choose to fulfill their ministry in other ways.

It also has something to do with the fact that fewer and fewer blessings seem to be given. Being a little hesitant ourselves to give a blessing, we might not talk about it much.

Part of what I wish to do in this presentation is to erase that fear as much as possible. That will mean, first of all, that we review our own lives and remember the experiences with the Divine that have been ours. At some time we must have known the power of that Presence and revealed it in our lives, or the call to evangelical ministry would not have come to us, and we could not have accepted it in full consecration.

When we accepted the call to evangelist, we promised God that we would strive to be God’s presence in the world. The people in our individual areas agreed to the call, trusting in our spiritual maturity and our

commitment to service. But they knew, as we did, and certainly God knew, that we would not always measure up, that we would often fail and even sometimes become among the lost ourselves.

Daily, and perhaps particularly in recent times, we realize that we have undertaken a journey that does not proceed on level ground. We often discover that we are called to walk where the rocks are rough and our feet are rubbed raw. We may slip and slide and even doubt the very foundation of our being, but those are the times we must remember the power of God's presence in our lives, a power beyond our own that has always seen us through.

In this regard I often think of that walk Peter and Jesus took on the seashore after the resurrection. If any one had failed it was Peter. We can understand if he felt pretty depressed that Jesus believed he had to ask him three times if Peter loved him. That is not what Jesus was about in that conversation, however. It was a call to Peter to serve as pastor to the people and the assurance that the love of Christ was his empowerment for that ministry.

We are no better, nor no less, than Peter. In our dark times when we may be ready to give up, Jesus is there as he always is with the promise "I will empower you. Feed my sheep."

I vividly remember my own experience after receiving my call to the office of evangelist. The call came when I was between my two missions to Norway and was in the hospital recovering from emergency surgery. It was three days after surgery that I received the letter informing me of my call. It was a mountaintop experience for me as were the three weeks of recovery following when the evangelist's office flooded me with materials and books to read.

I read words such as "The evangelist shoulders a thousand hurts that others might be free." That sounded good to me. I wanted to be that kind of person. Three weeks later I was ordained, November 15, 1987, and immediately returned to Norway and found that things had changed in my absence. Something happened that was very upsetting. I was angry and saw all the work we had tried to do going down the drain. I was tempted to leave and forget the whole thing. The next three days were some of the most painful I ever have spent.

I found that reconciliation had a high price, and sometimes we have to go with Christ to the cross and be willing to pay the price. At the very time I thought the Spirit had forsaken me, the way was opened, we were all empowered, and I understood as never before both the power and cost of reconciliation. It prepared me as nothing else ever had to be a minister of blessing.

It was 5½ months later, after I returned from Norway, that I gave my first blessing to Lisa Hedrick. She was one of my students, and it was commencement day at Graceland. The blessing took place in my upper room overlooking the campus, and it was a very special time for us both. It was in the preparation for that blessing that I learned something of the whole process. In our conversations I learned not only a great deal more about Lisa than I already knew, but I learned how powerful the presence of the Spirit can be in such conversations.

Much of what appeared in the final blessing emerged from the talks we had together. One blessing of the Spirit that I cherish is that God has given us the ability to penetrate words and discover beyond the words the inexpressible, what the words themselves never can convey.

Whatever kind of background we can bring to such a conversation, including experience in counseling, in spiritual growth, in reading, and in listening, is helpful. I was fortunate in having spent forty years teaching the great literature of the world.

Once, in a visit to Norway in 1952, Apostle Arthur Oakman wrote me a prophetic message in which he said, “Out of the treasures of the ages and the wisdom of those whom I inspired though they knew it not and the influence of my Spirit, you will be given words of light and power which will be a stay to many in their difficult days.” I can testify to the truth of that.

We have been speaking about learning the language of God. By reading the great writers of the world we learn how to express not just intellectual concepts but the deep experiences of our lives. Through the power of the Spirit the language of God can come to us when we need it.

I was fortunate in 1957, right after I had received my doctor’s degree, to be asked by the president of Graceland to prepare a course on religion and literature. That was a renaissance experience for me as I chose in preparation

to read the writings of those who dealt specifically with the encounter between the human and Divine. Through works as different as the Hindu Bhagavad-Gita and Kierkegaard's *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing* I learned that there really is a great similarity in the way the human and Divine contact is made throughout the world and in different religions. It was a testimony to me that there truly is a God, regardless of what name that God is called, who desires to have communion with us, God's people.

It is important for all of us, however, that we have a starting place, a place to be, a place we call home. It can come to us at different stages in our lives, at different ages and in a multitude of ways. But it is important that we have, as Tournier calls it, a place to be, a place from which we can start. It isn't necessarily associated with particular beliefs—they will come later—but it gives us an assurance that there is a power in the world greater than ours and that underneath are the ever-lasting arms. It gives us freedom to search, courage to question, the ability to live in ambiguity, to know that we may never in this life have the answers to our most important questions, but we do not fear because though we often see through a glass darkly that there will be a time when we see face to face.

The experience I have described is called by the mystics "spiritual awakening." It is the real beginning of our discipleship journey and the guiding force along the way.

My personal spiritual awakening came at the age of six. We had been in Norway for five years and were returning to the United States for a few months. On the way to Independence we stopped in Kirtland. It was in November 1927. A series of meetings was taking place at the Temple, and we became part of it. In one, someone sang a solo "In the Garden." It might have been my mother because it was a hymn she sang, and I probably had heard it before. But this time it was different.

When I heard the words "And he walks with me/ And he talks with me/ And he tells me I am his own" I was completely flooded with the truth and reality of those words. It was my first conscious recognition that there was indeed a power and a presence to which we could relate and who loved and supported us. Part of my understanding of what happened to me that day has grown through the years and has been a major factor in giving my life stability and a sense of home, a place where I belonged.

Some form of this experience has been true of the great religious writers of the world, and it certainly was true of the early disciples. It happened to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration when they knew without a doubt that Jesus was the Son of God. It happened to Thomas in the midst of his unbelief when he knelt before Jesus and said “My Lord and my God.” It happened to the disciples when they walked with Jesus on the way to Emmaus and recognized him at the breaking of the bread. Or we remember the Spirit flames of Pentecost when at least 3,000 people were awakened to the reality of Christ.

It is significant that the opening to the Worshipers’ Path in the Temple is a reminder of the Palmyra experience of Joseph Smith. Here was a confused fourteen-year-old, interested in the religious questions swirling about him, but he had no idea of what to think or do. He turned to the scriptures and came across those words, “If any lack wisdom let him ask of God.” He was not experienced in prayer and he wondered, “Ask of God? How does one do that?” But he thought he might venture. We know the rest of the story including those important words, “This is my beloved Son. Hear him.”

Once again we are back to the language of God. We sometimes can make mistakes in the hearing, or at least in the interpretation thereof as did Joseph occasionally, and from time to time he got off track. His own personality and desires got in the way of clearly understanding what the Spirit was communicating to him, but the power was there to bring him back.

When we ourselves are humble enough, we probably can remember when we have misinterpreted the words of God to serve our own purposes.

With so many voices speaking to us, asking for our allegiance, we sometimes can fail to distinguish the voice of God from our own firmly held beliefs and desires. President Wallace B. Smith said something important about this. “There must be a willingness to entertain whatever ideas come,” he said, “even if they seem at odds with one’s present perceptions of truth.”

That demands courage and a strong sense of discernment. As you know, there are many differences among us in what we perceive as the voice of the Spirit. That has caused a great deal of dissension among the people of the church.

Barbara Higdon and I were the first women in Lamoni Stake to be called to the priesthood. We came to the business meeting February 16, 1986, with trepidation, knowing opposition to our calls existed. When we arrived at Shaw Center, at least sixty people already were there who opposed women in the priesthood. When the calls were presented, plenty of people had something to say on both sides of the question. Each side claimed that the Holy Spirit had revealed to them that women should or should not be ordained. No one of us went away from that meeting completely happy because of diverse interpretations of the Spirit.

The first letter I received in Norway following my ordination to the office of evangelist was from an anonymous “friend” in Lamoni. It said, “Dear Velma, This is a voice from your past—it is so tragic that you have sold your soul for a mess of pottage. There is still a little time for you to renounce this dreadful mistake you’ve made. Sixty plus years of obedience to God’s commands have been jeopardized severely—but there is still a little time to repent—to become again a member in good standing instead of a fraudulent pseudo-priesthood member. Pray fervently for guidance. Don’t pray for approval.” Signed “a true friend from a long past.”

Well, which one of us was right? My “friend” from Lamoni, or my personal conviction that my calling truly was of God? How can one tell the difference? The only way I know is through the practice of discernment, and that is developed through spiritual disciplines. I remember that when I was about ten or twelve years old I was obsessed with the question “How is it possible to pray unceasingly?”

I even tried it one day. Some time in the middle of the day when I was sitting on a streetcar in Oslo I came to the conclusion there was no way this would work. Later the understanding came through the words, “In all thy ways acknowledge him.” Something like that I thought I could do. Later I found out it wasn’t all that easy. Brother Lawrence made the same discovery in the seventeenth century. After experimenting with many expressions of spiritual formation he concluded that simply going directly to God was the best way. He called it “practicing the presence” and felt he could be in that presence regardless of what else he was doing.

He, too, discovered it wasn’t always easy, and he often was on the verge of giving up. He persisted, however, and the rewards were great. So

has it been for me. Almost any spiritual disciplines practiced today can be helpful if they lead to a prayer life that keeps one in the presence of God.

What do all these comments about language and the presence of God have to do with the giving of an evangelist's blessing? Well, in some respects this blessing is more complicated than the majority of our prayers. For one thing it requires a double translation. First, we must discern what the Spirit is trying to communicate to us. Sometimes it comes in words, but even then they are words of our own making as the result of what we have experienced.

If there were time I could tell of my own experiences in this regard when it seemed I was conducting a dialogue with the God of all the universe. After such an experience I have wondered, "Did God really say those words to me, or did I make them up?" The answer, I believe, is a little of both. The words were from my vocabulary but the meaning came from the Spirit.

The prophets of the Restoration are quite right. Revelation always is affected by human understanding. It is a combination of the best of the human with the Divine. The thing that in some ways makes the evangelist's blessing more demanding than most prayers is that we first must translate the nudges of the Spirit that come to us into the best words we know. Then, in a sense, we retranslate those words into words that will be meaningful and authoritative to the individual. That is where our inadequacy of expression sometimes comes into play, and we must rely on the Spirit to lift our words to a higher level.

President Smith, in the speech I quoted earlier, said:

As soon as I begin transcribing what has been only a perception into active language, I am struck by the inadequacy of my vocabulary, the anemic quality by which I struggle to express the beauty and clarity of that which has flooded my mind, but that is all God has to work with, and within my limitations I strive to fulfill my calling and respond in my weakness.

Is that not the dedication with which we each presume to give a blessing?

I started out by saying I wanted to erase the fear many had of giving a blessing, and I might have enhanced it. It is no small calling to be what Everett Graffeo calls a co-author with God in giving a blessing to one of God's children. Whatever blessing we give carries our signature, as well as that of the Holy Spirit. It is the stewardship of every evangelist under the direction of the Holy Spirit to find the words of blessing that need to be spoken. This is an important gift we have been given to share. We need to approach it with utmost seriousness and with great compassion for the individual receiving the blessing. We are called to love as God loves and have the great privilege of expressing that love to human kind. May God's blessing ever be with us. Amen.