

numa

caring for the spirit of viha

THE HEART OF BLESSING

The word *kindness* has a gentle sound that seems to echo the presence of compassionate goodness. When someone is kind to you, you feel understood and seen. There is no judgment or harsh perception directed toward you. Kindness has gracious eyes; it is not small-minded or competitive; it wants nothing back for itself. Kindness strikes a resonance with the depths of your own heart; it also suggests that your vulnerability, though somehow exposed, is not taken advantage of; rather it has become an occasion for dignity and empathy. Kindness casts a different light, an evening light that has the depth of color and patience to illuminate what is complex and rich in difference.

Despite all the darkness, human hope is based on the instinct that at the deepest level of reality some intimate kindness holds sway. This is the heart of blessing. To believe in blessing is to believe that our being here, our very presence in the world, is itself the first gift, the primal blessing. As Rilke says; *Hier zu sein ist so viel* – to be here is immense. Nowhere does the silence of the infinite lean so intensely as around the form of a newly born infant. Once we arrive, we enter into the inheritance of everything that has preceded us; we become heirs to the world. To be born is to be chosen. To be created and come to birth is to be blessed. Some primal kindness chose us and brought us through the forest of dreaming until we could emerge into the clearance of individuality, with a path of life opening before us through the world.

The beginning often holds the clue to everything that follows. Given the nature of our beginning, it is no wonder that our hearts are imbued with longing for beauty, meaning, order, creativity, compassion, and love. We approach the world with this roster of longings and expect that in some way the world will respond and confirm our desire. Our longing knows it cannot force the fulfillment of its desire; yet it does instinctively expect that primal benevolence to respond to it. This is the threshold where blessing comes alive.

Perhaps we bless one another all the time, without even realizing it. When we show compassion or kindness to another, we are setting blessing in train. There is a way in which an act of kindness becomes an independent luminous thin, a kind of jewel box of light



that might conceal itself for days or years, until one day when you are in desperate straits, you notice something on the floor at your feet, you reach for it, and you discover exactly the courage and vision for which you desperately hunger.

Perhaps this is also true of place. When you are in a certain place, great love or kindness happens; it imprints itself on the ether of the place. When we pass there, hungry and needy in spirit, that loving imprint shines on us like an icon. In folk culture one always knew where to go when sorrow darkened the heart. These places can also act like a poultice to take the poison out of the heart's wounds. Rilke recommended that when life became turbulent and troublesome it was wise to stay close to one simple thing in nature. A friend of mine who had great trouble with her mind told me once that she had brought a stone into her apartment, and when she felt her mind going, she would concentrate on the stone. She said, "There is a fierce sanity in stone."

The above is an excerpt from John O Donahue's "To Bless the Space Between Us: A book of Blessings".

BLESSING @ RJH

A few years ago, a nurse asked if I would bless her nursing unit which had just opened.

I came into the unit late one night, spoke with the staff, and then slowly walked the length of the unit offering a blessing for all who came through the doors, for all who were within the rooms, for all the staff, and for all who were dying. I used words which the staff had given to me: healing, peace, gentleness, quiet, calm, and so on.

What is a blessing? For some, it is a setting aside of something special: a way of making something holy and sacred. It can be an act of cleansing and purification. It is a way of asking the Divine to be present in a more tangible way. It can be a petition to the Holy for protection. It can be seen as recognition that something or someone already is sacred, and we wish to acknowledge this.

There are a few things that a blessing is not. It is not an exorcism. Neither is a blessing an act of magic. Magic is when you say the special words, wave the wand exactly in the proper manner, and pull a rabbit out of the hat. You control the process. And it works, time after time.

With a blessing, there is no need to be exact, no absolutely necessary words or phrases, no requisite actions. And you do not control the process; it is a surrendering of control to a Higher Power, and asking for help, for goodness, for a blessing. And it does not always “work”. I know that life on that Unit did not suddenly become perfect. But it can become better.

A blessing is an invitation to the Divine for help in ways that we cannot begin to imagine, beyond our plans and our best-case scenarios. A blessing is open-ended; Magic is closed. The magic words and actions can **only** pull out a rabbit. Sometimes we don't need a rabbit – we need something else.

I invite you to be open to the blessings that are around you, open to the sacred wonders that can surprise and warm us, open to being a blessing to the patients with whom you work. I know that you already are. Many patients recognize you as angels; only some of them are confused.

Blessings,
Peter Shurvin, RJH Chaplain

Happy Holidays ! from your Chaplains

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