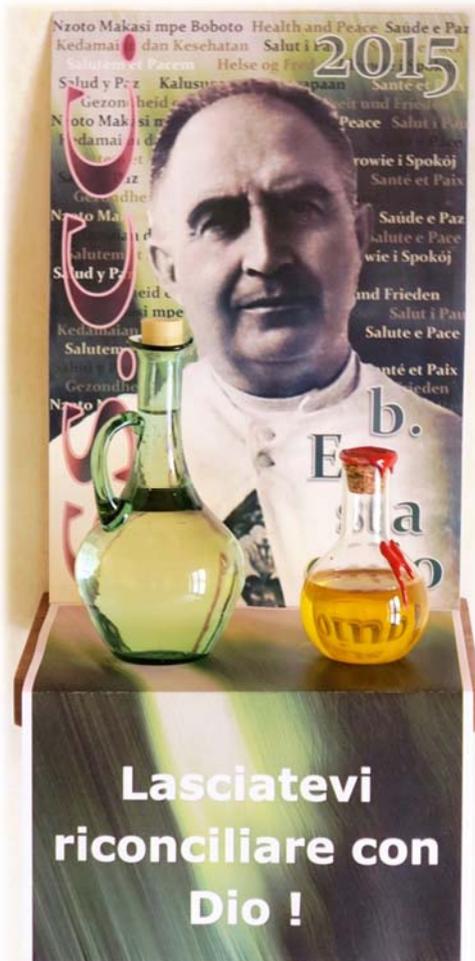
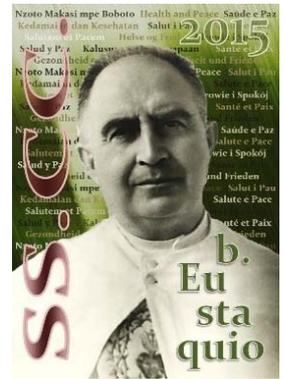


Bless, do not curse (Rm 12:14)

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I see myself called everywhere to take care of humanity, as a priest who, with his blessings, is seen as an instrument of Divine Providence for alleviating the sufferings of the neighbour...

Blessed Eustaquio

In Latin (*bene-dicere*) as well as in Biblical Greek ($\epsilon\upsilon\text{-}\lambda\omicron\gamma\omega$), "bless" means to say or speak well of the other, to want good things for him. In the Gospel, Jesus calls the merciful "blessed ($\epsilon\upsilon\text{-}\lambda\omicron\gamma\eta\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\iota$) by my Father" (Mt 25:34), that is, those of whom the Father speaks well, says good things and to whom He desires what is good.

"Curse" is, logically, the opposite: "*male-dicere*", that is, speak ill of the other, want bad things for him. Jesus, who knew that some harshly attacked him, trusted however that "there is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill ($\kappa\alpha\kappa\omicron\text{-}\lambda\omicron\gamma\mu\sigma\alpha\iota$) of me" (Mk 9:39).

Speaking well or ill of others is not an unimportant matter. The word bears a spiritual power: it is able to console, heal, build and unite; as it also can wound, destroy, divide and

even kill. It is an instrument of mercy and friendship; it can also be an instrument of violence and hatred.

Persons and peoples who speak well of one another live in harmony, understand each other better and are more ready to love each other and help each other. Persons or groups among those who cultivate evil speech, discrediting words and hurtful remarks, inevitably walk toward confrontation and discord.

Blessing

When our word invokes the Word of God, it becomes a vehicle for the Grace of the Holy Spirit and allies itself with this efficient Word that renews and saves. This is what happens in the sacraments and in liturgical blessings.

For **Blessed Eustaquio**, the blessing constituted a basic tool in his healing and reconciling mission. This was especially so during his years in Poá (1935-1941), when the healing effects of his blessings became more obvious, to the point of causing crowds of thousands of people daily.

The Archbishop of São Paulo, José Gaspar de Afonseca e Silva, who felt himself obligated to order a canonical investigation into the activity of Eustaquio, later declared: "Father Eustaquio did nothing censurable, but everything in accordance with the laws of Holy Mother Church, giving liturgical blessings according to the Roman Ritual and employing the Sacramentals of the Church".

Eustaquio did not invent any showy or sophisticated pastoral care. He did not give exaggerated or fanciful blessings. He limited himself to following the formulas regulated by the Church's liturgy. His interest was that of a pastor concerned about the real suffering of real people, whom he approached, offering them the best he had: the invocation of God's love and a blessing in the name of the Trinity.

While still in Poá, he wrote to his brother: "For a long time, but especially during last year, a lot of people have sought me out to be healed in body and soul. And with God's grace many souls have been converted and also many sick people, including blind and paralytic people, have been cured with a simple blessing."

Blessing is a concrete act of love and a profession of faith in the Providence of God. In blessing, we pay attention to the person we have in front of us, we renew within ourselves the resolute determination to serve him and seek his good, we remind him with our word and our presence, that God loves him, and we present him to God so that He might care for him.

If we think carefully about it, we will realize that our **reparative adoration** is also an act of blessing. What are we doing when, each day, we silently adore the Lord in the Eucharist, except bringing him the joys and sufferings of so many people (and also our own) so that He might embrace them in his mercy, redeem them and save them? In our

adoration "we speak well", to God, of the persons for whom we are praying and we call down the "good word" of God upon them.

What will be the consequences of the blessing that we make? Only God knows this. In blessing we acknowledge that we are not the absolute masters of our life and our fate. As Eustaquio said, "Life is in the hands of God; what a pity it is to see many who think that their life is in their own hands!"

In the same vein, **Pope Francis** reminds us that "we are not God" (Laudato si' 67). "A spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable," (LS 75) the God, whose loving strength is the true fountain of life and blessing. Francis goes so far as to ask us not to forget the blessing at meals! "I ask all believers to return to this beautiful and meaningful custom. That moment of blessing, however brief, reminds us of our dependence on God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their labors provide us with these goods; and it reaffirms our solidarity with those in greatest need" (LS 227).

Speak well of others

Many of us have the experience of how irritating and sad it is to bump into someone who tends to speak ill of you behind your back. Or the heartbreak of finding out about unjust criticisms that are made about you by people who do not show any interest in understanding you.

On the other hand, perhaps we have also enjoyed the treat of having a true friend, one that you can be sure will never say anything bad about you.

And finally, this sinner, who writes to you, also knows that aftertaste we often feel when we criticize and ridicule people who are not present... That which Francis described as "terrorism" in religious life when he told participants at the international meeting of consecrated youth (September 17, 2015) that gossip is like throwing a bomb on the reputation of someone who cannot defend himself. In this way, the community suffers, forgiveness becomes tiresome and brothers distance themselves from each other. All this is speaking ill; the opposite of blessing.

Blessing cannot be reduced to an isolated act. **Blessing is a way of being.** To be persons of blessing means to decisively engage in speaking well of others, cultivating that kind-hearted outlook that requires us to lovingly care for the dignity of each one of our brothers and sisters.

I remember, many years ago, when I was a teacher in a school in Spain, I got so tired of an unruly student that I started a disciplinary proceeding against him before the administration. It was easy to compile list of his disciplinary offenses. Then his mother came to see me and said, "Father, I know very well what you are saying to me ... but he's my son." She told me about the boy, who was adopted and had gone through many difficulties in life. She ended by saying, "give him a chance." This woman knew her son better than I did, because she loved him. She could correctly judge him; I could not.

Often, when I am faced with a brother who I find difficult, I remember that woman and try to imagine how his own mother, or his best friend, might look at this person... in fact, I try to imagine – even though it’s crazy on my part – how God looks at him. Then my anger subsides and I manage to soften my resistances to Jesus' command: “be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven” (Lk 6, 36-37).

Is it easy? No.

Transforming oneself into a person of blessing is an ongoing asceticism. This is something that **Eustaquio** knew well, “We must in no way think that we can do only corporal penance, it can also be done spiritually. To keep silence when one wants to speak, is it not perhaps penance? To speak well when one wants to speak evil, is it not penance? To cut short a thought that pleases our heart but displeases God, is it not penance? To forgive insults, affronts, scorns, and offenses, is it not penance?”

And in his notebook, he says to himself, “What should I avoid in my conversations: speaking about those who are absent unless it’s necessary, judging my neighbor; and not always forgiving my neighbor as soon as possible.”

Blessing, speaking well, talking well of others, is the task of those who consecrate themselves to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, because in them we know the love of God, which is the highest blessing. Anchored to these Hearts, the **Good Father** left us an example of a kind-hearted man who attentively loved his brothers, without intrigues or reservations. Let us learn from him.

Blessing is a way of being; it is also a way of proclaiming the Gospel. It is the indispensable condition for encounter and dialogue. This is what **Francis** recently told the bishops of the United States in Washington (September 23, 2015):

“Do not be afraid to set out on that ‘exodus’ which is necessary for all authentic dialogue. Otherwise, we fail to understand the thinking of others, or to realize deep down that the brother or sister we wish to reach and redeem, with the power and the closeness of love, counts more than their positions, distant as they may be from what we hold as true and certain. Harsh and divisive language does not befit the tongue of a pastor, it has no place in his heart; although it may momentarily seem to win the day, **only the enduring allure of goodness and love remains truly convincing.**”

