

Blessing by an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

Question:

Can an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (EMHC) give a blessing to a person who comes to them in the communion line with arms crossed?

Answer:

The answer is yes.

While the *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH* indicates that “the more a blessing concerns ecclesial and sacramental life, the more is its administration reserved to the ordained” (cf. no. 1669), it is important to note that the *BOOK OF BLESSINGS (BB)* states there are blessings where anyone who has been baptized can pray by “virtue of the universal priesthood, a dignity they possess because of their baptism and confirmation” (cf. no. 18). The bishops of the United States have even published a book entitled, *CATHOLIC HOUSEHOLD BLESSINGS & PRAYERS* (rev. ed.) in order to expand the opportunities for blessings by the lay faithful.

Blessings are considered to be “sacramentals” because they prepare people to receive the grace of God and to grow to be more like Christ. There are many occasions where non-ordained people offer blessings: when parents bless their children, when we gather around a family table or when we visit someone who is sick or suffering.

Liturgically, parents are invited to trace the cross on the forehead of their child during the baptism ritual and sponsors are invited to trace the cross on the senses of the candidate for full communion during the Rite of Welcome. Also, catechists are encouraged to bless catechumens and candidates throughout the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) process.

Lastly, a properly designated lay minister is allowed to assist with the distribution of blessed ashes on Ash Wednesday (cf. *BB*, no. 1659) and with the blessing of throats on the feast of St. Blase (cf. *BB*, no. 1628).

Since in the last two examples lay ministers may assist the ordained with those blessings it certainly is acceptable that an EMHC may offer a blessing to a person who comes to them in the communion line with arms crossed.

Within the context of our diocesan training for EMHCs we give these simple guidelines:

- The EMHC does not bless people with the consecrated host. This specific blessing is left to the ordained and only at the conclusion of the celebration of Eucharistic exposition with benediction.
- The EMHC may place a hand on the individual’s shoulder and say “May God bless you.” They do not make the sign of the cross over the individual in the manner of a priest or a deacon as this gesture is reserved to the ordained.
- They then move on to giving communion to the next person in their line.