

Blessing

The Hebrew word is *berakah* (accent on the last syllable) and it means *bend the knee* and *say something good*. Both these meanings are present (though not explicitly) in the final verse of the wonderful Christological hymn found in Philippians 2:5-11:

“...at the name of Jesus, every **knee must bend**, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and **every tongue confess to the glory of God the Father, Jesus Christ is LORD!**”

In Hebrew, the blessed one is Baruch (one of the prophets). Many times in the Old Testament people bless God, with the familiar *baruch atah...*, “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation...”. People bless God in the Old Testament because people say good things about God while they bend the knee (and/or bow). How people in Old Testament times regularly prayed is echoed in the Divine Praises:

Blessed be God.

Blessed be His Holy Name.

Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true man...

When proud parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles boast about their children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews, they are blessing them.

In Biblical Greek there is no word that means both to *bend the knee* and to *say something good* (Can you think of one in English or in another language?). Those who produced the Septuagint translation opted for *say something good*, that is, *eulogein*. Unfortunately, our English word that comes from this, *eulogy*, means that we will wait until people are dead to speak well of them.

When the Romans translated *eulogein* into Latin it became *benedicere*, from *bene* (well) and *dicere* (to say). Hence we speak of *benediction*.¹ I do not know what other priests mean when they say at the end of liturgical services, “May almighty God bless you...”. I only know what I mean. What I mean is that I want God to brag about you in the heavenly court, to all who would listen. Since God’s word is living and effective, since it accomplishes what God sends it to do (see Isaiah 55), when God boasts of our holiness God’s boasting actually makes us holier.

¹ In Spanish, the word is *bendición*; in Italian it is *benedizione*. In French it is *bénédiction*, and in Portuguese *bênção*.