

“The Power to Bless”

This name is from a book by Myron C. Madden. He wrote the book as a result of his observations from years of clinical pastoral education and counseling. His theory is that parents bless their children in a certain order: oldest sons are blessed by their mothers and oldest daughters are blessed by their fathers. The blessing reverses with second sons and daughters, Dad blessing second sons and mom blessing second daughter. It continues to switch back and forth for later children. Of course, there is a lot more to it, but right away we can see in the parable of the prodigal son that birth order blessing playing itself out. The prodigal son is the second born son, thereby blessed by the father. This son asks his father for his share of the family fortune and dad gives it to him. He goes out and squanders it all in loose living and what does dad do, he welcomes him back with open arms. The older son, blessed by mom, is irate when his wasteful younger brother comes back and is welcomed by dad. He has always been there, working his tail off for his father, and what does he get? This is a classic example of a seemingly non blessed son trying to earn the blessing of a parent.

The reality is, parents are all humanly fallible and the blessing that should be a help to children often goes awry. In severely dysfunctional families, a blessing can act more like a curse. In the story of the prodigal son, both sons are trying to earn their way into the blessing of their father. The younger son takes the blessing of the father for granted and when he wants to come back home, tries to gain his way back through guilt, his own. How often do we do that with God? While guilt can be a healthy emotion, it can also become a crutch that keeps us in a helpless position with regard to our relationship with God. Since we feel unworthy of God's love, we can avoid taking responsibility for accepting that love and acting on it. It sounds unbelievable, but we all engage in that practice at times. The older son believes that his father has no regard for him. He is focused on the sins of his younger brother, rather than accept the blessing which his father has already given to him. In this way, the older son can also avoid taking responsibility for his life.

In the end, that's what God's blessing is all about: knowing that we are each blessed by the Creator who is both father and mother for each one of us. And blessing, as

Madden notes, is not about receiving gifts, it's about receiving freedom. It's about the unspoken assent to become who we are created to become, fulfilled and productive. As the Gospel of John tells us, "know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."