Why do we constantly say Bless you in the Church when no one is sneezing?
Submitted by Kyle Bean, age 4

Kyle what a great question and obviously you are paying close attention to what we do at Mass. I really do applaud you for your awareness of what is happening at Mass. The issue of blessing people or things is really done for two reasons. We bless people because we want God to watch over and protect them in some way or we want to dedicate them to God. We bless objects because we want to dedicate them to God and through that dedication, we hope that objects will remind us about God in some particular way.

When we bless people after the sneeze it is about asking God to protect them. There is one theory about how this begin in the sixth century with Pope Gregory the Great. There was a serious illness called the bubonic plague that was causing many people to die. Pope Gregory thought if we blessed people when they sneezed it might help to protect them from death. In other words, we bless the person to put them in the hands of God that God might protect them. We do something similar around the celebration of the Feast of Saint Blaise with the blessing of throats. We bless the person in hope that God will protect them from any illnesses of throat and any other diseases. So, there are many ways we bless people with the idea of God protecting them. The most important is of course the Anointing of Sick which is one the sacraments. The Anointing unites the sick person to Jesus, and we ask Jesus to watch over them in their illness.

In the Mass generally, we are asking God to bless the person that the person might be more dedicated to God. It is about helping them to live out their faith more fully and more deeply. It is about helping them to move closer to God and to express Christ more fully in the life they lead. The blessing in the Mass is about getting us to live our lives more in accord with our baptismal promises. It is about helping us to be like Christ: priest, prophet and king. We live our lives as priests when we live a life centered in prayer. We live our lives as prophets when we in word and action speak about our faith. When our lives match up with how Christ lived his. And, we are kings when as Christ we come to serve and not be served. The blessing at Mass then is really centered on our life in Christ.

Both types of blessings are important and both of them are about centering our lives in God more fully. But each blessing does it in a slightly different way. As said above one is about recognizing that are real protection in life comes from God and ultimately is the source of our strength and hope. The second recognizes that for life to have meaning our lives must be centered in Christ at all times.

Again, Kyle thanks for your great question!