Inspiration and Blessing

Teacher Background

Blessing Prayers:
Blessing is the act of declaring, or wishing, favour and goodness on others. The blessing is not only the good effect of words; it also has the power to bring them to pass. In the Scriptures, even if spoken by mistake, once a blessing was given it could not be taken back. The nature of blessing is always reciprocal: we are blessed and, in turn, we must bless. But to be blessed and to bless, we must be compassionately connected. Blessing is a technique of inner transformation which moves us to a greater realization of self and God. It is a concrete action.

Benediction is a prayer that God may bestow certain blessing on people. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the form of priestly benediction was prescribed in the Law: “The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” You may recognise this formula as now forming part of the Rite of Blessing in the Dismissal Rite of the Christian Eucharist.

Blessings have five distinct purposes:
1. God blesses creation: e.g. nature (Gen 1:22); humanity (Gen 1:28); the Sabbath (Gen 2:3); nations (Ps 33:12); and individuals (Gen 24:1). God also blesses people by giving life, riches, fruitfulness or plenty (Gen 1:22, 28).
2. People “bless” God-for the purposes of worship, adoration and praise (Deut. 8:10; Ps 101:1, 2 etc.).
3. Those in positions of power and authority and holy leaders can bestow blessings on others: patriarchs pronounced benefits on their children, often when near death (Gen 49:1-28). Leaders often blessed people, especially when getting ready to leave them- e.g. Moses (Deut 33); Joshua (22:6-7); and Jesus (Luke: 24:50).
4. Equals can bless each other in friendship (Gen 12:3); support and to establish connections and links with people who are special- see for example http://healing.about.com/cs/prayersblessings1/index.htm; http://healing.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.holisticpolitics.com%2Fgentle_art_of_blessing.htm; www.uua.org/worshipweb/affirmations/blessings.html#p
5. People can bless things when they are set aside for sacred use. (1Cor:10:16)

Inspirational Prayers
Prayers (written, spoken or sung) composed or constructed for one purpose by an author or community, can themselves inspire others to seek the same qualities, behaviours or state sought in the prayer- e.g. peace, service, generosity, compassion, consolation, inspiration and commitment. Readers/hearers of these prayers (many of the prayers which inspire others are constructed in very personal contexts), are inspired to respond with, or say to God, “me too!” They are drawn on to better/greater things or belief by the words, values, emotions and/or aspirations contained in the prayer. Inspirational prayer brings about **metanoia**: a change of heart in the hearer.

What attributes make a prayer “inspirational”?
The following quote may help to come to an understanding of Inspirational prayer.
If prayer were intended only to inform God of our desires and deficiencies, it would be unnecessary. Its true purpose is to raise the level of the supplicants by helping them develop true perceptions of life so that they can become worthy of God's blessing.

Prayers by others become inspirational when the self-discovery of the authors, or their perceptions of life become so clear through reflection and experience, that in expressing them they capture the essence of what many others are also seeking and so others can also say “yes!” to their discoveries of how or what one should be. Many of the great inspirational prayers and aspirations come from mystics and saints who spent many years reflecting and contemplating before being able to express simply but clearly an insight into the human condition or relationship(s) with God.

Inspirational prayers, then:

- are often composed in the context of an intense life, or spiritual, experience
- may be the culmination of many years of thought, reflection and prayer
- Express simply and with great clarity some of the complex mysteries of life
- Capture the hearts and minds of ordinary people because of their insight, capacity to express complexity simply, or, in the case of music, to touch human emotions.
- can provoke intense emotional responses by their content or the context in which they are heard or presented.

The context of the experience of the prayer can also be inspirational: for example, prayer in beautiful settings or prayer with and among people bowed down by oppression or pain or sorrow can inspire the hearer to want to act or to respond in a variety of ways. What appears to be a quite mundane prayer can be made inspirational when used or presented in an inspirational setting.