

November 27, 2014 ~ Thanksgiving Day

Thanks-saying, Thanks-praying, Thanks-singing

Luke 17:11-19

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I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way. [1 Corinthians 1:4-5a]

As Jesus was entering a village, ten persons with leprosy met him ... And when he saw them, he said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." As they were going they were cleansed. And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. Jesus said in reply, "Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine? Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?" [Luke 17:11-12, 14-18]

I'm convinced that gratitude – *thankfulness!* – in the most basic religious emotion.

Gratitude expresses an awareness of our spiritual landscape in which God's grace – God's goodness – surrounds us and fills our lives with every good thing. The German spiritual writer, Meister Eckhart, wrote in Middle Ages:

The most important prayer in the world is just two words long: Thank you.

That's the point in today's Gospel proclamation. Jesus heals ten lepers, and only one takes the time to say *thank you*. So important is that *attitude of gratitude* that it colors how we look at life. When we take time to say *thank you* to God, we express the awareness that all we have ultimately flows from God's goodness.

This awareness sometimes is expressed even in Hollywood movies. About ten years ago, the movie *Bruce Almighty* has God giving divine powers to a TV reporter, played by actor Jim Carrey. It's a silly movie, for sure, but it tries to put across a serious message. In an interview, Jim Carrey says it's about "not seeing your blessings."

What he says as a take away from making the movie, I invite our teenagers to listen to. He says: "I would challenge anybody in their darkest moment to write what they're grateful for, even stupid little things like the green grass that made them feel good, the friendly conversation they had with somebody on an elevator. You start to realize how rich you are."¹

I say that that's good advice from a Hollywood actor: be aware of your blessings, write them down, realize how rich you are. Actor Jim Carrey is spot on.

I'm convinced that we Catholics ought to be pretty good at the *attitude of gratitude*. After all, Sunday after Sunday, the theme of our gatherings is always, always *gratitude*. We proclaim the Gospel – the Good News – from this ambo. The Good News is that Jesus' death and resurrection removes death as a threat. Death is not final. Rather, Jesus shares God's life with each of us.

Then, with bread and wine, we remember Jesus' death and resurrection, not as a distant memory, but as something that happens for us, here and now. We inherit from Jesus and the Apostles a very Jewish way of praying. (The Hebrew word is *berekah*, for this type of prayer.) The Jewish Passover remembers the Hebrew people moving out of slavery in Egypt and into a covenant relationship with God. In their prayer, Jews are there with Moses and the people long ago.

Similarly, we tell God we're grateful for what Jesus did for us long ago. In our prayer, we know that we're there with Jesus moving through death to life, moving out of slavery to sin and into a new and eternal covenant relationship with God. That's our conviction. That's why we always begin that prayer over bread and wine by saying, *We lift up our hearts to the Lord*, and by acknowledging that *it is right and just to give God thanks and praise*.

That's why we say that *gratitude* and *thankfulness* is our most basic religious emotion. That's we say that if you're not grateful, you're not really very spiritual.

Today is Thanksgiving Day. As Catholics, we're always about thanks-giving, thanks-saying, thanks-praying, thanks-singing, thanks-living.

I read the story of a man named John Kralik. In 2008, he's separated from his wife, living in a one-room apartment in Los Angeles, and his law practice has hit hard times. On a walk in the mountains, he decides to be grateful for what he has.

He first writes thank-you notes, and the first one goes to his son for his Christmas present, but he doesn't know his son's address. He realizes that he's been so caught up in his day-to-day life that he lost touch. So, he focuses on son on what he's been doing and writes a personal, hand-written thank you rather than send one that's machine created. John Kralik calls his son for the address, but his son says he'd like to stop by and take his dad to lunch.

While at lunch, he's surprised when his son repays a \$4000 loan that Kralik has forgotten about. So, he writes his son another note, thanking him for repaying the loan.

Then, John Kralik makes it a personal practice to handwrite someone a thank-you note every day, including family members, law clients, and the server at the coffee shop he goes to. Kralik says, "I was at the point of financial collapse, but I decided to keep on saying thank you."

He writes thank-you notes to colleagues who sent him clients and to people he lost touch with. Some friendships have been renewed. At the end of the year, he stops writing notes. He realizes an emptiness, so he picks up the practice again.

Kralik admits that there continued to be some setbacks. However, he says, “In the act of being thankful – which is after all good manners – my world began to thrive.” In fact, John Kralik is now a judge on the Los Angeles Superior Court. He wrote a book about his experience, entitled, *365 Thank Yous: The Year a Simple Act of Daily Gratitude Changed My Life*.²

We gather in this sacred space, because we know that life is full of blessings and gifts and that the giver is God. And we know that the greatest gift is the Communion that Jesus makes possible and to which we say: *Amen!*

It’s why we’re always about thanks-saying, thanks-praying, thanks-singing, thanks-living. We’re always about *thanksgiving*.

¹ Puig, Claudia, “Spiritual Carrey still mighty funny.” *USA Today*, 5/21/03, p. 1D.

² Kralik, John, *365 Thank Yous: The Year a Simple Act of Daily Gratitude Changed My Life*, (New York: Hyperion, 2010).