

**Thanksgiving Day Year A**

**11/26/2020**

**Deuteronomy 8:7-18; Psalm 65; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Luke 17:11-19**

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Happy Thanksgiving!

Today is the Feast Day of Thanksgiving.

A day to give thanks to the Almighty God whose love endures for ever and ever.

A day to be full of gratitude.

This is a day to be thankful.

And that is what is often celebrated around dinner tables around the nation.

We might share what we are thankful for.

But when we consider the difference between being thankful and the name of our holiday – Thanksgiving...

we find the end of the words quite telling.

Being thankful is a good thing... it is to be full of thanks...

And of course, we like that word *full* on this day...

as that is the plan for many of us later today... to get really full.

But thanksgiving has a totally different sense...

it includes the word give.

To give thanks... Thanksgiving.

And this is the real purpose of thanksgiving...

giving thanks to God.

Not just to be thankful for all we have...

But even more so to admit that everything we have is a gift from God.

This is the attitude of the Christian in thanksgiving.

It is to acknowledge that all we have is our Lord's.

Even our very lives are not our own...

we have been bought with a price...

the price of the blood of Christ...

*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father... as St. James wrote in his letter (1:17)*

And this is certainly the right attitude to have...

Because if the Pandemic has taught us anything...

and I hope it has certainly taught a good many things...

One of those is this: Life is fragile.

Many of us are one step or two from financial ruin...

many are experiencing that in our nation and in the world right now.

All of us are a disease or sickness away from disaster.

The Pandemic has also brought the ravages of stress, anxiety, and loneliness.

Many will experience the Holidays this year in a whole new light of understanding...

Our attitudes can change in an instant when family, friends, and the church disappoint us.

Life as we know it... is very fragile.

To acknowledge that God is the giver and provider of gifts in this world is to accept humility and perspective.

To be thankful for all we have is good...

but even better is to understand that God is our provider.

St. Paul points to this in our second reading today... from 2 Corinthians.

Paul writes:

*You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. (9:11)*

Notice it does not say you will be enriched in every way and live like kings on this earth...

It does not say that you will be enriched in every way so that you can live a satisfied life.

The scripture says:

*You will be enriched in every way **so that** you can be generous on every occasion...*

What we have received as a gift... we should give as a gift.

And the result of this giving is...

*thanksgiving to God*

Therapist Susan Rhoads notes:

*That the word thankful is defined as “pleased and relieved.”*

*These are both great feelings.*

*Everyone wants to be pleased and relieved.*

*But that’s just it; they’re just feelings, and feelings fade.*

*However, the word grateful is defined as “showing an appreciation of kindness.”*

*This is where the difference lies; being thankful is a feeling, and being grateful is an action.<sup>1</sup>*

So the more gratitude we have... the more charitable we are.

It is about sharing the gifts we have been given.

We don’t necessarily deserve them...

so we should share them with others.

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Rhoads, The Difference Between Gratitude and Thankfulness at <https://www.psychmc.com/articles/difference-between-gratitude-and-thankfulness> accessed on 11.25.2020.

It's stewardship.

It's charity.

This is probably why it is really hard to find a truly thankful greedy person.

Someone who hoards and gathers all their stuff is not thankful...

but usually anxious, stressed, and tired.

It is not thankfulness they feel, but pride.

It is not gratitude they have, but fear.

It is not humility, but selfish ambition.

These weaknesses are not distant from our hearts either.

And the temptation is there for all of us to consume more and more.

But giving is greater than receiving.

Science is proving this connection between gratitude and giving.

Dr. Christina Karns, a neuroscientist at the University of Oregon researched this topic in 2017.

She wondered what happens in the brain when you receive a gift versus when you give one...

and whether the neural response is different if you are more grateful.

She wrote:

It turns out that the neural connection between gratitude and giving is very deep, both literally and figuratively. A region deep in the frontal lobe of the brain... a hub for processing the value of risk and reward; it's richly connected to even deeper brain regions... The participants I'd identified as more grateful and more altruistic via a questionnaire [showed] a stronger response in these reward regions of the brain when they saw the charity gaining money. It felt good for them to see the food bank do well.

Next, Karns wanted to know whether, by changing how much gratitude people felt, she could change the way the brain reacts to giving and getting. So she split participants into two groups.

Over three weeks, one group journaled about the things they were grateful for, while the other group journaled about other (non-gratitude-specific) happenings in their lives.

What happened?

The people in the gratitude-journaling contingent reported experiencing more thankfulness.

What's more, the reward regions of their brain started responding more to charitable giving than to gaining money for themselves.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sigal Samuel, Giving thanks may make your brain more altruistic at <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2019/11/27/20983850/gratitude-altruism-charity-generosity-neuroscience> accessed on 11.25.2020

There brains were more turned on by kindness, generosity, and charity than growing their own wealth...  
because they were focused on gratitude.

The more thankful we are the more charity we will have.  
The less thankful we are the less charity we will have.  
They go together.

This idea is inherent in our liturgy...  
When we receive the Body of Jesus Christ...  
the bread of life...  
in communion...  
it is called, in our Prayer Book the Great Thanksgiving...  
The Eucharist... which is the Greek word for giving thanks...  
When we celebrate this feast of the Body and Blood...  
We remember the sacrifice of Jesus Christ...  
With the words of Jesus:  
*Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you...* (BCP, 368)  
This Great Thanksgiving...  
Celebrates God giving his Son to die on the cross.  
For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...  
(John 3:16)

And we celebrate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who gave of himself so that we might receive salvation...

we might become adopted into the family of God...

that we might have the hope of eternal life.

The Eucharist... the Great Thanksgiving is a celebration of giving.

A celebration of the charity of our God.

To be truly thankful is to birth a heart of giving.

So on this Feast Day of Thanksgiving...

Be thankful.

But don't stop there.

Don't settle for just a feeling of being thankful.

Take the next step.

Display gratitude.

Show gratitude.

And with that gratitude live a life of charity.

A life of giving.

A life of generosity.

And may we follow the words of our Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord:

*It is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:35)*

Amen.