

Thanksgiving Day

Coming to Mass today is the perfect way to celebrate Thanksgiving. After all, Eucharist comes from the Greek word, Eucharistein, which means "giving thanks!" Our celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy is always a call to return to the source of every gift, the God who gave Himself for us – God, who loves us so very much and wants to have a close personal relationship with each and every one of us. What a wonderful blessing!

It is the invitation to give thanks which gathers us as families and friends around the dinner table today. Although a "secular" holiday, the celebration is profoundly religious at its core. To give thanks is to acknowledge the existence of a Creator with whom we can talk as a friend and as our loving Father. We do not merely celebrate how much we have today; we celebrate how much we have been given by God. We need to make sure that God is our center focus today, and not just a fleeting thought. In the midst of any struggles we may face, we really do need to stop and give thanks to God. We are a truly blessed people.

We've gathered together today to ask for God's blessing and to give thanks for all of His wonderful gifts. How very blessed we are to be able to gather as a country each year and give thanks! To be perfectly grateful is to know our place in this world. We are creatures of God and loved by Him. Everything we have is a gift from God. Everything, our bodies and souls, our talents and abilities are all reasons to give thanks to God.

Today, as we take time out as a country to give thanks to God for all of the graces and blessings that He has bestowed on us, we recall that for us, as Catholics, to give thanks is something that we do (or should do) constantly. It is not something we do only once a year but it is something we should do every day. If we read through Scripture, it tells us literally hundreds of times, about our need to give thanks to the Lord, how we need to bless the Lord, how we need to glorify the Lord. It is not something that is optional for us. And it is something that the Church does at every moment of every day because somewhere on earth at every moment of every day, Mass is being offered, people are praying, hymns of thanksgiving are being offered to God.

There is a very important dialogue of prayer that happens in the heart of every Mass. The priest prays that the Lord be with all present and the people pray that God will be with the priest in a special way so that he can do what God ordained him to do. The priest exhorts the people to lift up their hearts, their desires and their lives to God and the people reply that they have indeed done that. The priest then says, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God: and the people respond, "It is right and just." The priest then echoes that sentiment saying, "It is right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Holy Father, almighty and eternal God." To give thanks to God always and everywhere is the right thing to do, no matter what our circumstances. If we are not grateful, we are not able to receive all of the grace that God is trying to give us. If we are not grateful, we cannot receive the salvation that Jesus won for us.

Are we truly thankful for what God has given us? Can we identify with the words of Sirach: "Bless the God of all who has done wondrous things on earth?" Can we find truth in Paul's claim that we have been "enriched in every way?" Can we, like the leper in today's Gospel, return to God to give Him thanks because we realize what He has done for us? Do we take the time each day to thank God for the many gifts He has given us? Does it take a special holiday to remind us to thank God? Or is it all about Turkey and football?

Let us spend today with family and friends and celebrate all of the marvelous gifts we have received from our loving Father, but let us keep God and our thankfulness to Him at the center of the day today!

- Fr. David M. Chiantella