

# Thanksgiving

## ENCOURAGE GRATEFUL HEARTS

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. Psalm 106:1 KJV*



Before a musical makes it to Broadway, the show has previews in smaller cities to tweak it for the lights of 42<sup>nd</sup> street. Well, I did a trail run on this sermon the other day at the 6:30 Mass before the big time of the Thanksgiving Day Mass. I would say it got mixed reviews. Vic nodded a few times in what I considered approval, Janice yawned several times, but I think she was awake, Gerri smiled, Dennis strolled around the gathering area during the homily, and Pat Ricci was making sure we had enough Eucharistic ministers. All in all, they gave it five stars which sounds very good until you realize their grading system is based on one hundred stars is a good homily. But as the Redemptorists initials after name are our CSSR and some say they stand for constantly same sermons repeated, I will give it again.

Several years ago, I made a long-desired pilgrimage to Lourdes. I flew on British Airways to London and then was to board a plane to a city in France called Toulouse, which is not too far from Lourdes. I found Heathrow airport very difficult to navigate. I believe they have five terminals and you must take a bus to get from one to another terminal. The people in England speak a very strange version of English that is nothing like the proper articulation of Brooklynesse. I kept stopping and asking seemingly official people for directions. I have never done the New York City Marathon, but I did manage to walk 26 miles around the terminals several times in search of the elusive terminal E. Finally, my frustration and blood pressure rising, I asked a gate agent with a semi-shout, where is the darn bus (I

will confess I may not have used the word *darn*) to terminal E. He patiently explained how to get to it. I half listened, dramatically threw my arms up in frustration and stormed off. As I walked away in an exasperated huff, I heard a cockney accent say after, *A proper thank you is required, Sir*. I did not return to give him a proper thank you as he requested. But after three days in Lourdes, after praying at the Shrine of our Lady, and bathing in the miraculous healings waters, I did manage to cool down and say a prayer for him.

In today's Gospel, we hear the account of Jesus healing ten lepers, with only one, from the tribe of Samaritans who were despised by the Jews, returning to thank our Lord for this most precious gift. When Jesus speaks about the need to be thankful, he is not speaking about mere etiquette. We have been taught since early childhood to say thank you, to send thank you notes, to text words of gratitude for a favor granted. Expressing gratitude to others, be they the surgeon who saved our lives, the waitress who refilled our coffee, our spouse who stopped and brought us our favorite food, the stranger who held the door for us, or the conductor who told us how to arrive at CitiField is good manners. All of us have experience, I am sure at some time in our lives, of giving a young child a gift. Immediately, the parent says to the child, *now what do you say*. Usually, the child says thank you. But kids, like all of us, can have a stubborn streak, and so there is no proper thank you. Mom get angry and demands the thank you be given. The child yells no and throws the gift at the giver. Meanwhile, the gift giver stands in embarrassment and wishes he had not started this situation.

Is that how God sees us? We are the child given gifts who must say thank you. Although we should thank God and every person who blesses us in some way, the words thank you, however important and beautiful, are not the key to what God invites you and me to live. Our Lord is calling us to live our lives continually with a deep and profound sense of gratitude. Every moment, every heartbeat, every beat, every relationship, every day, every hour and minute is a gift from God. A heart filled with gratitude sees the world in an amazingly different way than one who has not allowed this grace to transform him or her. I know a lot about the Bible, but I am unable to constantly quote chapter and verse as does a good Baptist preacher. Yet two verses worth remembering are John 3:16: *God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not die but*

*have eternal life. Repeat that to yourself often. Psalm 116: 12 is another keeper: What return can I make to the Lord for all that he has done for me.*

Gratitude flows freely on Thanksgiving Day. Americans today, whatever their faith, commit to make sure no one eats alone on this day and no one is without food. There is no law from the Government to do this. This generosity is the natural response to share what I have with others since I know I am blessed. However, to live this value of gratitude that leads to action, daily and not just one day a year, can only happen when I know what God has done for me.

As I was preparing this talk, I thought this has been a tough time for the past months. We have had destructive hurricanes. We have witnessed brutal acts of random terrorism. We fear the possibility of war. Politically, we are a very divided nation. President Abraham Lincoln declared the proclamation for Thanksgiving Day in 1863, during the American Civil which was the darkest and saddest time **in our history with these words:** *The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.*

Today, we look at food and see the wonderful blessings of God, we look at our family and friends and see blessings, we look at bread and wine and see the Body and Blood of Jesus.