

## **A Thankful Heart**

Thanksgiving is arriving this year differently from previous years. These last few months have been an unhappy period in the region. The military conflict in our area resulted in hundreds of innocent men, women, and children losing their lives, and many thousands of others seriously injured. Once again there has been enormous pain and suffering in a part of the world whose holy sages have shown man for millennia what is required of him – to love mercy, to do justly, and to walk humbly before God.

Gratitude is at the heart of the Christian faith. It is the emotion that underlies the whole Christian experience. At the foundation of our faith are not rules and regulations or guilt or fear, but a foundational amazement at all that we have been given, and an unstoppable desire to offer thanks and praise to the giver.

The deepest truth of our faith is that “life is a gift.” The best gift we can give ourselves is to cultivate gratitude as a way of life. Gratitude is not simply to say, ‘Thank You,’ it is the way of looking at the world that does not change the facts of your life but has the power to make your life more enjoyable.

Developing a thankful heart expands our spirits and frees us from the comparisons and resentments that can consume our energy.

We Christians are called to be agents of a different spirit in our time, a spirit of abundance, of gladness, even when we seem to have less than we did or very little.

If we want to make a list of the little things as well as the large ones for which we are grateful, I suggest that we do three things:

First, we can offer our thanks and praise telling our Almighty God how grateful we are, putting our trust in God even in the face of our fears and anxieties.

Second, we can pass the generosity on by allowing God's goodness to flow through us to the immense needs of those we see around us.

Third, we can pray and ask God to give this land, and the whole world, a just peace, and to guide us in making our family, our community, our church and our country, more grateful and generous. We can ask God to help us build a generous society for everyone.

I know that sometimes in the middle of difficulties, it is hard to be grateful and to give thanks. But, it has to do with our way of thinking and how to appreciate things. I believe that in many times we suffer from the crisis of faith, a growing lack of trust in all our governments and institutions.

If we are going to live glad and grateful lives, we will have to do it in a world that is a mixture of good and bad. Most people experience loss, pain, and suffering. Someone said this is 'the left hand of God. The right hand of God, he says, is the way God brings us joy, friendship, and love. But, the other of life, contains disappointment, pain, and

suffering. Yet God comes to us mysteriously, hidden in the times of suffering and crisis, so that the hard times, too, can draw us close to God.

‘Gives thanks in all things,’ St. Paul says. It is no easy thing to live with this mixture of joy and sorrow. There is a fact that we are not free to determine the events and hardships that come our way, but we are free to decide how we will respond to them.

We are sure about Christ’s love. Christ’s love is at work in this moment in you and me and across our region, and we believe that it will finally draw all of us into a new and healed world.

In this world the choice is ours. Either we live in a way of gratitude in these hard times by reaching out and giving, serving and caring for our neighbor next door and across the city, or we choose lives of fear and selfishness.

I will end my sermon by saying:

Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your blessings, see what God has done. Count your blessings, name them one by one. And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.