

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Nov 28th 2013

Today is Thanksgiving Day in the United States. A holiday built around gratitude. Families and friends gather together to enjoy good food and time together. Weeks before the holiday the grocery stores abound with the ingredients for traditional thanksgiving meal including turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie. While the focus can be on the feast there are other signs of Thanksgiving as well. Many Facebook users have been posting a reason to feel grateful for each and every day in November. Jobs and warm homes and loving families are popular items on the gratitude lists. And it is so nice to see the Thanksgiving holiday expand beyond the actual Thanksgiving day. This societal embrace of gratitude has me praying about Thanksgiving in a different way.

Several years ago I worked at a contemporary art museum. The day after Thanksgiving was the busiest day of the year. Families would be at the door waiting for the museum to open. They were eager for some kind of activity after a day of sitting around together for the Thanksgiving meal. We could see old family patterns flair up as siblings would quibble about who would pay admission or perhaps adult children would debate with their parents about what time to head to the museum restaurant for lunch. It was hard to appreciate that they were engaging as family. I was puzzled that they had gathered together for Thanksgiving and just the very next day they were struggling to be kind to one another. But now as I reflect upon those encounters I realize that true gratitude of God and the gifts we have received by God comes at times when life does not feel perfect. For instance at times when the old quarrels with one's sister come to play

I am blessed with a default switch of gratitude. I feel God's presence when I am on a walk on a beautiful day, when my daughter shares a heartfelt insight, when a student describes the impact of a class project. I so easily praise God with gratitude in those moments. However, just like those stressed families at the museum, gratitude for God's grace can be powerful in the moments which are not quite so beautiful. How can I be grateful during the scores of daily annoyances such as when I struggle to detach the garden hose from my house for winter or when my sore knee slows me down during my walk or when I find a colleague difficult to listen to? Praying with gratitude about these moments can help me appreciate all the gifts in my life that are present to bring the annoyance to my awareness: a house to which the garden hose is attached, a healthy body to go for a walk and a colleague who is passionate about many topics. And can I go deeper with my prayer and pray in gratitude when the challenges in my life are more profound and painful? When I feel despair, gratitude is not my default mode. But yet what better time to thank God? Gratitude brings abundance and by praying in gratitude I can better open myself to God's love.

Today's Psalm gives us a simple prayer of gratitude which reminds us to be grateful this Thanksgiving day and always: I will praise your name for ever, Lord. Every day I will bless you, and I will praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord and highly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable. This Thanksgiving I pray to carry the feelings of gratitude and appreciation that are so present today with me every day of the year!

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