

PROPER 29, (PENTECOST 26) THANKSGIVING SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2021

This Thursday we will celebrate Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving for many people is their favorite holiday because of getting together with family and this year, with more people vaccinated, more families will be able to gather than we did last year. It is both a secular and religious holiday although thanksgiving for any religious person should be a daily occurrence.

Meister Eckhart once said, "If the only prayer you ever say in life is 'Thank you' it will be enough." A grateful heart does not come from telling ourselves we should be grateful. And no preacher, and no Thanksgiving sermon can make us live with grateful hearts. Thanksgiving doesn't come when the table is dressed to perfection or the house is filled with the latest gadgets, and all life's problems are neatly solved. The key to living with a grateful heart is to see what is right before us and around us; to look around and take stock.

Today is the day when we give thanks to God for the true gifts of this life. We give thanks for our country with all her faults and foibles but supplies us with so many freedoms and so many opportunities. Today is the day we give thanks for our community. Today is the day we give thanks for the spouse we take for granted, the children and grandchildren who dominate our lives, the relatives who sometimes drive us crazy and the friends who love us although we don't see them as often as we like. Today is the day we give thanks for the old memories, for those we love that have died but whose souls continue to touch our souls. Today is the day we give thanks for all the assumptions of our lives – for food, clothing, shelter, the work we do and the health we enjoy.

Most of us sitting here are so incredibly blessed by life it is easy to take those blessings for granted. So, my question for all of you this morning is what are you grateful for? How many blessings can you think of right now that you have? Is it for rain, for sun, for waking up, for the fact that your body, despite aches and pains, works, for food, for seeing a friend or a rainbow, for the love of your children or grandchildren? What are you thankful for this morning?

Did you know that in the Jewish faith they are commanded to bless a hundred times a day, and yet we think, what is there to bless in an ordinary day? Going to work, paying bills, raking leaves, shopping, sitting in traffic? What activities do we participate in daily that we think are religious that would elicit from us a prayer a hundred times a day? Somehow, we have decided that counting our blessings or being thankful, even for small things, is relegated to holidays. The Jewish people believe one hundred blessings are for an ordinary day and ordinary activities not just a holiday.

What are you grateful for? What blessings, what little things that you feel, see or touch, that can you recite without thinking too hard about them. It is so easy to take the little things in life for granted. Do you remember the horrific story from 2018 regarding the Turpin family that had kept their 13 children prisoners in their own home? Recently, in an interview with Diane Sawyer, she asked one of the sisters what was the first thing she did after being rescued. She replied that after she got out of the hospital the first place she went to was a park with two of her sisters. She said, "I was so excited because I could smell the air and I could smell the grass. I was like, 'How could heaven be better than this? ... Oh my gosh, this is so free, this is life.'"

How could heaven be better than this? The simplest of things like breathing fresh air and smelling the grass we take for granted. This is heaven to a young girl who never had the opportunity to experience it yet this seemingly innocuous event is a daily blessing we don't even think about. Sometimes it's only when we've been deprived of something do we realize how grateful we are for the small wonders when they come our way. Sometimes we just forget to look for the blessings. We get out of practice. It's like anything. We have to practice it to become it. We must give thanks to be become grateful. A simple exercise can be saying one thing each day for which you are grateful: Even if it's the air you breathe, or the comfy chair you can curl up in, or heat on a cold day. Be grateful for what you have. It is so very true that sometimes we really don't fully appreciate all we have been given until we are deprived of it.

There's a story told of two angels who are sent to earth, each with a basket. One was told only to collect human requests. The other holding a basket, was to gather humanities' prayers of gratitude. The first angel cried and complained of the burden to carry a basket so filled, so heavy, loaded with all the pleas. And the second angel cried too, for his basket was all but empty.

What are you grateful for? How do you show your thanks to God? Perhaps the greatest way to show our gratitude is by being a blessing to others and reaching out in concern to those in need. Sometimes being reminded of how we can be a blessing comes from the unlikeliest source.

A rabbi tells the story of a homeless man who wandered up and down Wisconsin Avenue in DC. He would come often to the combined Thanksgiving meal offered by St Alban's Episcopal Church and Washington Hebrew Congregation. He was a joyful man. He would sing and talk to anyone who would listen. He used to stay at a bus shelter and, sadly, it was his makeshift home. One day the rabbi was driving by and saw the man standing in the soaking rain next to the bus shelter. The bus shelter had plenty of space as there was only a commuter or two in the shelter. The rabbi thought this was very strange so he stopped and asked him why he was getting soaked. The rabbi insisted he move into the bus shelter because if he didn't he was going to get sick. The man said, "I can't. I can't get inside the shelter. These people will get wet." The rabbi asked him, "What do you mean by that." "I scare them, he said, so they stand out in the rain when I'm in there, but when I move out, they all stand inside and stay dry. I'll be alright." The rabbi gave him his umbrella and left with a life-long lesson.

This homeless man who so many walked by, had more compassion and concern for others than so many of us. He saw them not as objects, but as people. He would rather stand in the rain so others could stay dry than to care for his own needs. What a blessing he was to the others.

What have you done to be a blessing to others? True thanksgiving requires a giving of ourselves. If we are grateful for God's abundance, how will we share that abundance with the hungry, those who don't have basic clothing or housing? The art of thanksgiving and being a blessing ultimately means appreciating all the little things that life gives us which is all rooted in God.

So, you see, every day is thanksgiving on the calendar. However, there is one more prayer we should add which is a simple petition: O God, you who have given so much to me, give me one thing more. Give me a grateful heart.

As we approach Thanksgiving, let each of us remember the true source of our blessings and let that sense of gratitude for all that our loving God has given us fill our hearts. Amen.