



Praise God from whom all blessings flow

*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this
is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

1 Thessalonians 5:18

As I sit to write this letter, which will coincide with Thanksgiving and our Thanksgiving appeal, my thoughts turned towards the theme of thankfulness and its place in our individual and collective lives. I am convinced that thankfulness is one of the essential pillars, if not the most important, of the spiritual life. We should give thanks at all times and in all circumstances, but this is easier said than done. But, then I began to count my blessings, which translate into thankfulness for all God has and is providing.

So, I am thankful that God has allowed me to serve in my home community to be in the midst of all my friends and their families. I am thankful that God led me to this community in the first place and that I have been warmly accepted and embraced; first as a teacher and guidance counsellor, and now as the deacon in charge of this parish. I am thankful for the people in this congregation and their many gifts and talents. I am thankful for the age of our congregants because it means we have great wisdom and experience. I am thankful that we still have willing volunteers to run the many programs and ministries that we offer. I am thankful for the willingness to embrace change and the courage to act on this transformation. I am thankful for the ability to reach those at home for worship and look forward to the day of seeing everyone in person again. I am thankful that God has chosen us to be light in the world where there is so much darkness. I am thankful for the energy you all give to make this place a warm and welcoming home for all. I am thankful that God loves us so much!

The question that I find most concerning is that, with all the things we have to be thankful for, why is it that so often thankfulness is not present in my own life and I suspect absent in many of yours. This is not a new problem; the numbers of passages of scripture criticizing a lack of thankfulness are about as frequent as those commending it. It is my concern though, that today, the lack of thankfulness has a disastrous impact on personal spirituality and morality and has local, as well as global consequences. We have so much to be thankful for in our lives but ironically, we, at least as a society, find it very difficult to maintain thankfulness. Part of the issue is the common habit of comparing our own situation to those who appear more fortunate than us and thus undermining our satisfaction and happiness. This is aggravated by living in a world where we are bombarded with messages reminding us of all that we don't have and encouraging us to aspire to possessing them. As one author once said, the insatiable need for

more has become the spiritual basis of our entire civilization. There is a growing conversation challenging this basis, to which I believe, we as people of faith, and as a faith community, must essentially add our voices. It is not just that achieving greater and greater wealth is environmentally disastrous, and fails to make us happier, it is fundamentally a pointless exercise.

This is a spiritual truth that has long been held by our faith tradition but not always enacted in our lives. Our Thanksgiving gospel message from Mark says, "Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" This focus on what brings meaning and purpose to life is critical not only to our personal spiritual health but to the many organizations to which we belong and ultimately to the global community. We must learn to be satisfied with being generous givers rather than excessive consumers. We must remember to be thankful for what we have and work to advance the lives of those around us that have not.

How then to live a more thankful life? Personally, I came to the realization, albeit slower than I would have liked, that far too often, I had taken the many blessings in my life for granted and allowed them to go unremarked and without influence on my own thoughts and behaviour. I have found that I need to constantly work at increasing the attention and awareness with which I approach the various aspects of daily life. When I stop operating on autopilot, my consciousness of all that I have to be thankful for, and my ability to express gratitude in meaningful ways are both significantly improved. As a specific spiritual discipline, I have found for some time now that the intentionally reflecting on thanksgiving as part of my daily devotions has been important.

I pray that this season of Thanksgiving will be a time of joy and celebration for you and those you love and that the spirit of thankfulness will pervade your life and ministry. I pray for continued blessings from God to find peace and comfort and satisfaction in all that you do. I pray that you reflect on your blessings and give thanks for all that you are and all that you have, and give glory to God almighty, Creator of all, and the loving Saviour of your life.

Yours in Christ,

Mark +