

Reflections on Thanksgiving

There are many passages of Scripture about giving thanks and praising God. There are several suggested by Catholic liturgy for celebrating Mass on Thanksgiving Day. These are the readings we chose for the Mass at Our Lady of Fatima in Delanson, NY on Thanksgiving Day, 2013.

A reading from the book of the prophet Zephaniah

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!
sing joyfully, O Israel!
Be glad and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The Lord has removed the judgment against you,
The Most High has turned away your enemies;
The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst,
you have no further misfortune to fear.

Zephaniah 3:14-15

A reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians

Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,
clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy,
with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances
you have against one another. Forgive us the Lord has forgiven you.

Over all these virtues put on love, which binds the rest together
and makes them perfect. Christ's peace must reign in your hearts,
since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace.

Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness.
Let the word of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you.
In wisdom made perfect, instruct and admonish one another.

Sing gratefully to God from your hearts in psalms, hymns, and inspired songs.
Whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Give
thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:12-17

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke

Mary set out, proceeding in haste into the hill country to a town of Judah,
where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leapt in her womb.

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out in a loud voice:

"Blest are you among women and blest is the fruit of your womb.

But who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

The moment your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby leapt in my womb for joy.

Blest is she who trusted that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled."

Then Mary said:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior,

For you have looked with favor on your lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:

The Almighty has done great things for me,

And holy is your Name.

You have mercy on those who fear you

in every generation.

You have shown the strength of your arm,

You have scattered the proud in their conceit.

You have cast down the mighty from their thrones,

and have lifted up the lowly.

You have filled the hungry with good things,

and the rich you have sent away empty.

You have come to the help of your servant Israel

for you have remembered your promise of mercy.

The promise you made to our forbears,

to Abraham & Sarah and their children forever.

Luke 1:39-55

Homily

*♪♪ In the Lord I'll be ever thankful, in the Lord I will rejoice.
Trust in God, do not be afraid, lift up your voices, the Lord is near;
Lift up your voices, the Lord is near. ♪♪*

That song is a **Taizé** chant - [it's #566 in your *Gather* hymnal.] It sums up what the readings say about Thanksgiving.

Today is a wonderful family feast that celebrates a lot of what is good about our country. I saw Bluebloods last Friday, and at the end of the show, the Regan family gathered around the dinner table, and each one took a moment to give thanks. We did the same thing at the end of the Knights of Columbus meeting on Monday. I plan to do it with my own family when we gather this afternoon.

Still, as wonderful as it is to gather with family and friends, there is pain in remembering the ones who are not physically present, and anxiety about what is far from perfect in our world & our lives. My sisters, brother and I will not be able to celebrate with our mother who died in 2009. There are many who are out of work or struggling to make ends meet. There are people who are homeless and hungry in our world, and in this community. There is more demand on food pantries than ever.

To give thanks is a *choice* that is made not only because of our real blessings, but also in spite of some parts of our personal and communal situations. Yet it is a healing choice - a choice made by Jesus even as he died, and by the thief who said those beautiful words we heard last Sunday, words set to music in another Taizé chant, ♪♪ "*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" ♪♪ It is a choice that can give us hope in the midst of difficult times,
and can bring light to the darkest shadows.

Mary chose to give thanks in the prayer we heard in the Gospel - the prayer we call the "Magnificat". But that prayer turns the values of our world upside down. That was so clear to the dictators & generals in Central America in the 1980's that you could be thrown in jail for praying it in public. They knew that they were the rich and powerful that would be cast down and sent away empty, while the poor that they were oppressing were the ones God chose as his own beloved. That prayer for justice is still very powerful and still inspires people like those who protested the continuing existence of the School Of the Americas just last weekend. [The **S**chool **O**f the **A**mericas, recently renamed **W**estern **H**emisphere Institute for **S**ecurity **C**ooperation, still trains known human rights abusers. Some of them were involved in killing Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador in 1978. Check their website: www.soaw.org]

It is still the teaching of the Gospel and the church that the wealth that gives people status and power in our world doesn't impress God, but the poor are the ones God lifts up and cares for. It is still the teaching Christ that the power which is the drug of choice for so many political leaders does not keep them from being cast down from their thrones, nor does it protect them from sickness, sin and death. It is still the teaching of our church that the pride that isolates leaders from the people they are supposed to be serving is no help when they are being scattered by the might of God's presence.

So, in the light of Mary's prayer and her son's Gospel, what are we giving thanks for on this Thanksgiving day?

Do we give thanks for our relationships with each other & God's presence in our lives?

Do we give thanks that God is in our midst, that the Lord is near, as both the song and the 1st reading tells us.

Do we give thanks for the chance to feed Jesus in the least of the members of his family? [Jesus who said so clearly, "Whatever you do or fail to do for the least of my family, you do to me."]

Do we give thanks for the knowledge that he has come to us when we most needed his love and nourishing presence?

Are we humble enough to realize that everything we have is a gift - and that thanksgiving is our normal stance before God who gave us, - who still gives us what we need?

All of these are more important, and secure than money, status & power.

The *choice* to give thanks is also a *call* to thanksgiving. It is part of how we live our baptismal call. When we celebrate Eucharist, the very word comes from the Greek which means "thanks & praise".

So how do we give thanks in a world that shouts at us to take credit, to hold on to control and protect our wealth and status at any cost?

The words of Paul to the Colossians which we heard as the 2nd reading are the charter & description of the choice and the call to give thanks for the gifts that cannot be taken from us by any earthly power.

"Bear with one another, forgive as the Lord has forgiven you, let the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Give thanks to God the Father through him."

The beautiful hymn, Now Thank We All Our God, was written at a time of great suffering and loss. The composer, Martin Rinkart, was a pastor during the 30 years war in Saxony. Because of the war, he was the only pastor in a city that was the refuge of many. Sometimes he did as many as 50 funerals in a day. He wrote the words shortly after his own wife had died. He continued to trust and to give thanks to God in the worst of circumstances.

♪♪ Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices.

Who wondrous things hath done, in whom his world rejoices.

Who from our mothers' arms hath blessed us on our way,

With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today. ♪♪