

**Thanksgiving, October 11, 2020, St. Anne's
Deuteronomy 8:7-18; Psalm 65; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Luke 17:11-19**

Thanksgiving is traditionally a time when families and friends gather around a table to feast on the fruits of the harvest - roasted turkey, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes with gravy and maybe pumpkin pie to name just some of the more common foods associated with this holiday. Each family builds their own traditions – often held onto firmly over the years and sometimes over the generations. Of course, this year for many of us, our traditional practices are having to be modified. Many families can't gather together at all because of the need to keep physical distance. Others plan to eat a (rather cold!)

Thanksgiving dinner 'picnic style' outside in an attempt to keep from sharing any viruses that are potentially present. But regardless of whether or not we can physically gather to share a meal this year, the main tradition of Thanksgiving still remains – being thankful for the abundance of creation and for all God has given us.

The story of the Exodus is, in a sense, part of a family tradition of thanksgiving. These are the stories the children of Israel told and retold through the generations to remind themselves how they had suffered through slavery and oppression in Egypt and then were rescued in a most dramatic fashion by God. Of how God led them through the wilderness and looked after their needs until they were given a land of abundance where they could settle and plant their vineyards and grow their food. And in today's reading they are reminded that while their former life in Egypt and then the wilderness held many dangers and struggles, this new life in the Promised Land also holds danger – just of a *different* sort. The danger of *complacency*.

While the book of Deuteronomy dates from *centuries* after the people settled in Israel, it's written in the form of a long sermon delivered by Moses just as the people of Israel are about to enter the Promised Land. In today's passage the people are called to remember everything God *has* done for them, and *continues* to do for them, so they won't fall into the trap of imagining they did it all themselves. They are being reminded here not get *complacent* about the good things in their life and start taking them for granted.

We humans have a natural tendency towards complacency – partly because of our great ability to adjust to our environment. Scientists call this sensory adaptation. For example, when you get into a hot bath, it feels too warm until your body adjusts and then it feels good. When you walk into a room you smell coffee with vivid awareness, but 10 minutes later you don't notice it at all. But while this is an important ability that helps us adapt to harsh conditions, and has allowed humans to live in every climate zone on the planet, it also means we have a built-in tendency to *complacency*. We very quickly get used to whatever we have and in short order we start to yearn for *more* or better.

The antidote for complacency is a focus on *gratitude*. So, Thanksgiving is a good time to reinforce the *spiritual discipline* of not only remembering the blessings of the past but more importantly paying attention to the abundance of grace and blessings we receive *now* - each and every day. And then being **thankful** to God for it.

While *God* doesn't need our thanks, there are a number of reasons why *we* need to **give** thanks and praise for the blessings of our life. One is that

thanksgiving and praise by its nature enhances and strengthens relationships. When we acknowledge **God** as the source of all the good things we enjoy - when we give thanks and praise for what God has done for us - our gratitude deepens and strengthens our relationship with God. So it's important to be intentional about developing an attitude of gratitude. We can *train* ourselves to be grateful for each new day and whatever it brings us. Because in every day, no matter what problems or struggles it brings, there are also always things to be grateful for – like having food to eat, a home to live in, intelligence, a love of music, opportunities to help others, relationships and so on. So, I encourage you to set aside a few minutes at the end of each day to name at least 3 blessings you received *that day*. Try to find something *new* each day to be grateful for. The warmth of a freshly baked cookie. The nutrition of a fresh vegetable – even if it's a scourge of the vegetable world like brussel sprouts or lima beans. The *luxury* of having more than **one** pair of shoes. The chance to learn something new – even if it's a hard lesson.

God's gifts often come to us through other people – both those we know and those we'll never meet. So, give thanks for the ingenuity God gave to the people who invented all the various things you use in your day – your computer, your fridge, your phone, medications, paper, written language, your knitted sweater, zippers, buttons Somebody, sometime had to invent and design and make *everything* you use. Every single thing we have is the result of generations of ingenuity and hard work from countless people.

Perhaps today especially we might remember to be grateful for having the chance to worship God and be part of a community of faith. Be grateful for the ladies who come and arrange the flowers. Be grateful for the time and

energy and money spent by people to keep this parish community going. Nothing here - from the clean washrooms to the PowerPoint slides we are using to worship - just appears out of thin air but are the result of gifts of time and energy and money.

In other words, **intentionally** cultivate in yourself an attitude of gratitude for all the blessings, large *and* small, of your life.

Today, and **every day**, I invite you to open yourself to the grace of God through praise and thanksgiving. Don't fall into the trap of complacency - of imagining that it's just your own hard work has given you what you have. Remember to see the grace and mystery and wonder of God that floods the world around us every day. Loren Eiseley says we should approach each day with *astonishment*. He writes, "The world is a *miracle* we've grown accustomed to." So, look around you - find that which is *good* and thank God for it - find that which is caring and thank God, *and* the person who is doing it. Look around and think about what's noble and true and beautiful - and express your gratitude for it - no matter *what* the bad or the ugly or the petty may be up to. It is so easy to focus on just the problems and concerns, and right now there are **a lot** of those! But there is also so much to celebrate! *Life* itself is a *gift*. And we live in a world full of life. So, don't let complacency for all the good things in life take away the joy of them. Be thankful!