

### **The Sacrifice and Power of Giving Thanks**

The ability to give thanks may or may not come easy to you this year. Sometimes we are more euphoric in our gratitude as we are enjoying life and remembering to thank God for His goodness. Sometimes, however, we are forgetful. Other times, we may be not be feeling very thankful because experiencing the circumstances of life has been painful. We don't feel like we have much to be thankful for and we're not in the mood to do it. And yet St. Paul tells us to "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (I Thessalonians 5:18). How is it possible to give thanks in all circumstances? By remembering that thanksgiving is sacrificial and powerful.

Thanksgiving is sacrificial because it means we have to stop thinking of ourselves and think of someone else. When Jesus healed the ten lepers in Luke 17, only one returned to say thank you. In fact, he is the only person to thank Jesus for his healing in the Gospels. The others simply took the healing and thought of their good fortune. The caution here is that when we have something we recognize as good, the chances may be one in ten that we remember to give thanks. That is why we need to *habitually* thank God. That means regularly sacrificing our time to offer prayers of thanks.

What if we give thanks for the good things and then we begin to experience hard and difficult times? In this case, we can remember that the only other person recorded thanking God (besides Jesus and the Samaritan leper) in the Gospels is the Publican. But what does he thank God for? That he is not like other people. We are often thankful when we compare our circumstances to others. We are thankful we live in this country and not another; that we have food when others don't; that we have homes and others don't. We have to remember that giving thanks for good things is supposed to be a "sacrifice of thanksgiving"; in other words, that it is not about possessing the good things, but about acknowledging that we don't deserve them. We don't receive them because we're good but because God is. Thanking Him takes the focus (and thus the reliance) on us and our stuff.

If we learn habitually thank God and do so not just for the good things, we can experience the miraculous, transformative power of God in our lives. When Jesus gives thanks in the Gospels, miracles happen. He gives thanks for loaves and fishes and they multiply. When we give thanks for having our needs met, God can multiply our time and energy to His glory. Jesus gives thanks to God for raising Lazarus *before* Lazarus comes out of the tomb. If we expect God to raise our dying and decaying souls, we should thank Him, acknowledging that we know He can do it. Jesus gives thanks for the wine and the bread at the institution of the Lord's Supper. If we are truly thankful for the gift of His Body and Blood, then we can receive the forgiveness of sins.

Sacrificing ourselves to the power of God is what makes Thanksgiving so important. May we constantly give thanks so that His presence remains with us throughout the year.

