

[Readings: Sirach 50:22-24, Psalm 138, 1 Cor. 1:3-9, Luke 17:11-19]

Most of us were toddlers when we learned to say “please” and “thank you.” We were a little older when we fell into the habit of asking, begging, nagging, whining, “Please, please, please, please, ple-e-e-e-e-ease!”

Older still when we began to try bargaining. If you give me this ...” “If you let me do that ...” Then, “I’ll never ask for anything else again.” (Yeah, sure.) “I’ll do my homework right after ...” (Insert laugh here.)

Perhaps not surprisingly, our relationship with God tended to follow the same track. Almost always ready, willing and able to ask politely. More than a little slow with the thank-you note. If we even remembered to write it and mail it. Or email it. Or text it. If we even remembered to say it with more than a passing “thank you” in the same tone and sincerity we may have used in years gone by when our mother would pointedly ask, “What do you say?”

So how do we — how can we — sincerely say “thanks” to our Heavenly Father? Well, thankfully our Creator has given us many ways to do just that. Journalist Bob Dodds from Our Sunday Visitor suggests are seven of them. See which ones you can do.

**1. GO TO MASS.** NO DOUBT YOU KNOW THE WORD “EUCHARIST” IS FROM THE GREEK FOR “THANKSGIVING” OR “GRATITUDE.” BUT, OF COURSE, UPPERCASE-“E” EUCHARIST REFERS TO MASS AND THE BLESSED SACRAMENT. WHEN THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ASKS “WHAT IS THIS SACRAMENT CALLED?” ITS FIRST ANSWER IS “EUCHARIST, BECAUSE IT IS AN ACTION OF THANKSGIVING TO GOD.” GREAT! GO TO MASS. A DONE DEAL. NEXT.

It’s an action of thanksgiving, which certainly implies us doing something there besides stand, sit, kneel, walk up for Communion, stay for a closing hymn and head out the door. Without our actively taking part in the Mass — praying with others, offering our own private prayers, reverently receiving the Blessed Sacrament, joining in the singing — then we’re pretty much like that child blurting a fast and nearly thoughtless “thank you” to appease Mom.

2. DO WHAT JESUS TOLD US TO DO. UH OH. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR US? YES, HE SAID TAKE PART IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD IN MEMORY OF HIM (LK 22:19), BUT HE ALSO MENTIONED SOMETHING ABOUT “LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU” (JN 13:34). WHAT BETTER WAY TO SHOW GRATITUDE FOR THE GIFT OF FAITH THAN TO LIVE THE FAITH? HOW DO WE LIVE IT? LOVE AS JESUS LOVED. AND HOW DO WE DO THAT? FIND OUT BY SPENDING SOME TIME THIS YEAR — EACH MONTH, EACH WEEK, EACH DAY — READING ABOUT HOW HE DID IT. SPEND TIME “PRAYING” THE GOSPELS.

Then, too, living the Faith — living our gratitude to God — means living the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Sometimes that can be particularly challenging, but other times it’s pretty simple. Small choices throughout the day can develop over time into virtuous habits that make us more inclined and better prepared to tackle those challenging opportunities.

3. DON’T PUT A GIFT FROM GOD IN YOUR SOCK DRAWER. WHAT? SOMETIMES WE RECEIVE A GIFT FROM A FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND AND QUIETLY TUCK IT AWAY IN A DRESSER DRAWER. IT’S NOT SOMETHING WE NEED, WANT, KNOW HOW TO USE OR EVEN LIKE. WHEN WE DO THAT WITH A GIFT FROM GOD IT RUNS COUNTER TO WHAT JESUS TAUGHT IN THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS (MT 25:14-30). THE LESSON? USE WHAT GOD GIVES YOU. PAY ATTENTION TO THE TALENTS GOD HAS GIVEN YOU, DEVELOP THEM, AND USE THEM TO HELP OTHERS.

4. SAY ‘THANK YOU’ TO OTHERS ... AND MEAN IT. CONSIDER THIS: IN DESCRIBING THE LAST JUDGMENT, JESUS SAID, “WHAT YOU DID NOT DO FOR ONE OF THESE LEAST ONES, YOU DID NOT DO FOR ME” (MT 25:45). SO PART OF WHAT YOU CAN EASILY DO FOR OTHERS THROUGHOUT THIS NEW YEAR, WHICH IS THIS GIFT FROM GOD, IS THANK THEM. “THANK YOU” TO THE STORE CLERK. YOUR CHILD’S TEACHER. THE SUNDAY HOMILIST. AND ON AND ON.

5. WRITE IT DOWN. THIS MAKES A GREAT NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION. ONE THAT’S EASY TO KEEP TRACK OF. AND HARD TO CHEAT ON.

Even those who hold little stock in religion or spirituality have discovered keeping a daily journal or log of people, events and things for which they’re grateful helps them mentally and physically.

You — lucky you, thank God — have that added layer or, more accurately, that foundation of Catholicism. Jotting down a few things at the end of every day can be a prayer of thanksgiving. Why? Because you know the source of all goodness, blessings, grace and love.

6. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. NOT TAKING YOUR HEALTH FOR GRANTED IS A KEY WAY OF THANKING GOD FOR THE PRICELESS GIFT THAT IS GOOD HEALTH. SOMETIMES THAT'S RELATIVELY SIMPLE. PAYING A BIT MORE ATTENTION TO INCLUDING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES IN YOUR DIET. FLOSSING. CUTTING BACK ON SCREEN TIME TO GET MORE SACK TIME.

But sometimes taking care of yourself can take a lot of effort, such as getting into a program that helps a person overcome an addiction. Going to a mental health professional to learn how to better handle past or current issues that can be physically, mentally or emotionally crippling is also a good step.

Taking care of yourself also means going to confession. Sometimes that's simple; sometimes so very, very difficult. Turning to God in that way is a form of self-care that can be easily overlooked but it's one that has, well, eternal consequences. What a great way to thank God for your immortal soul.

7. Avoid ingratitude Try to be thankful and not fall into the habit of feeling like "I deserve this." Thank God that God doesn't give us what we deserve!

And, if I may add, a P.S. Thank God for the bad times as well as the good times. There's no way bad can be good, right? Except ... if "God writes straight with crooked lines," perhaps there's something he can do, something he is doing, with and through what you're suffering today. This isn't to say any of us love the hard and horrible times. Jesus didn't. Just as we do, he wanted out of his. "He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will'" (Mt 26:39).

Yes, he knew what would come from it — our redemption — but that didn't take away the pain of his passion and death.

So what's that other facet of your particular cross?

Your suffering can be a form of prayer, a uniting of yourself more closely to Christ crucified. It can be a gift of deep, beefy prayers for others. One you

don't want but one that is far from useless. One that even if you're sick, elderly, disabled or frail proves you're far from "useless," no matter what others may think. No matter what you may sometimes feel.

There are lessons and truths, there are depths of spirituality that can only be learned by going through, by living with, hard times. There can be unmatched prayers. There can be many astounding graces.

But ...

All that being said, sometimes it can help — tongue-in-cheek — to acknowledge, "God never gives us more than we can handle ... but sometimes He seems to overestimate how much we can take!

In the spirit of Thanksgiving, here is a reflection attributed to [Blessed Solanus Casey](#), the Capuchin friar who served in Detroit for 20 years and who was beatified in 2017 in Detroit:

"Let us thank Him at all times and under whatever circumstances. Thank Him for our creation and our existence, thank Him for everything — for His plans in the past that by our sins and our want of appreciation and patience have so often been frustrated and that He so often found necessary to change. Let us thank Him for all His plans for the future — for trials and humiliations as well as great joy and consolations; for sickness and whatever death He may design to plan ... Thank Him ahead of time for whatever He foresees." AMEN!