

[Readings: Rev. 7:2-4, 9-14; Psalm 24; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt 5:1-12a]

Everybody loves a big reunion with loved ones – the joy of seeing one another, telling stories and of course the food and fun! The Solemnity of All Saints is exactly like this. Pope Francis said, “We are all united with all the saints, not just the most well-known. But also those “next door” – our family members and acquaintances who are now part of that great multitude.” So today is a family celebration. The saints are close to us, indeed, they are our truest brothers and sisters. They understand us, they love us, they know what is truly good for us, they help us and they await us.

We believe that there is a unity and interaction among all the faithful in Christ. During these early November celebrations, those of us still living (the Church Militant) unite our hearts with, and in a special way remember, the faithful departed, whether they are in Heaven (the Church Triumphant) or in Purgatory (the Church Suffering). Pope Saint Paul VI calls all of us “The Faithful.”

St. Paul addresses the early Christians as “saints” (Eph. 1:1) and refers to those in Heaven as “that great crowd of witnesses.” Judas Maccabeus urges prayers for the dead, “that they may be absolved of their sin” (2 Mc 12:46). And the visionary of the Book of Revelation (Rv. 7:9-10) sees “a great multitude” as they stand before the throne of God.

The theologian Hans Kung puts it this way: there are no “self-made saints.” In today’s First Reading, we are reminded that nobody in Heaven had been perfect in life, no one had been free from hardships. Indeed, some had died for their faith. All of them had “survived the time of great distress.”

In our darkest moments, it is vital to remember that if we keep the faith and finish the race, we, too, will survive any time of great distress in our lives. How do we do this? By being submissive to the will of the Father, to be humble of heart, to be steadfast in prayer, and to put our possessions in perspective.

And let us remember that life here is Act One of a two-act play. The Second Act is eternal life. Let us pray to all the saints in Heaven to toss us a life-line, and to live by their example and divine aid. AMEN!

[Readings: Isaiah 25:6, 7-9; Psalm 23; Romans 6:3-9; John 6:37-40]

You may have heard these two stories that connect us with today's observance of the Feast of the Faithful Departed, or All Soul's Day.

A prominent elderly gentleman sat down in the kitchen of his home with the morning paper for his usual breakfast. As he got comfortable in his chair, he snapped the paper to the front page. He gasped when he saw this headline: "Prominent local bank president dies suddenly," along with a photo of the man himself. Thinking that an obvious mistake had been made by the newspaper, he decided to phone the head of the board of directors of his workplace to tell him of the error.

The chairman answered the phone: "Hello?" "Hello," came the reply. "This is the bank president calling. Did you see the front page of today's morning paper?" "Yes," said the chairman of the board. "You're dead. And where are you calling from?"

The second story is about two women who had similar e-mail addresses, but they were different by one letter. The first woman had just lost her husband to death and had just returned home from the funeral. The second woman was planning to meet her husband in Florida. He was down there for business and got a free ticket for his wife, who still needed to pack and get to the airport. Her husband sent her a telegram updating his status. Unfortunately, he mistyped the email address and sent it by mistake to the widow. When the widow opened her email after getting comfortable at home, she was stunned to read: "Darling, arrived safely down here. Sure is hot. Can't wait until you arrive tomorrow. Your loving husband." The widow fainted.

Where are the souls of our loved ones whom we remember today? Where are they calling from? How hot is it where they are? As Catholics, we believe that their final destination is either Heaven, a temporary detour to Purgatory, or in Hell. So we pray for them by the help and the grace of the Holy Spirit, and we participate in their final preparations by our prayers and sacrifices.

Offering prayers for those who have died is ancient in origin. In the Old Testament's Second Book of Maccabees. Judas Maccabeus orders his army to pray and offer sacrifices on behalf of their fallen comrades. Tombs found in the Roman catacombs are inscribed with prayer requests for the deceased (2 Maccabees 12:46).

There are, sadly, some Catholics who do not believe in Purgatory. Happily, the Catholic Church still teaches that Purgatory is real.

Why? Because the Catholic Church believes in the sanctifying work of Jesus Christ, the reality of God's justice and mercy, and the fact that we have two options for eternity: Heaven or Hell. Smoking or Non-smoking.

But why do I say "happily"? Because Purgatory, properly understood, is the mercy and grace of God at work, and so is a revelation of His love. Of course, the misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Purgatory are many. It is sometimes presented as being on an equal plane with Heaven or Hell.

However, Purgatory is not a final destination, but rather a state of preparation for the destination of Heaven. Likewise, Purgatory is not part of Hell. Yes, there is suffering in Purgatory, but it is the joyful suffering of those being completely cleansed of all impurity so they can enter the presence of God.

Not all of the righteous are completely free of imperfections and lesser, or venial (Latin, *venia*, meaning "pardonable"), sins. Once the righteous die, they are bound for Heaven. But if they are not yet completely holy, they have need of further sanctification and therefore head to what C.S. Lewis described as a divine "washroom."

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains: "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of Heaven (Paragraph 1031)

For those who choose Jesus Christ, for those who are faithful to Him in thought, word and deed, but not yet ready to see the Father and be with God for all eternity, Purgatory sounds like a good place to be temporarily. As Mother Angelica once said, "If I get sent to Purgatory, I don't mind sitting in the back of the bus, because I know where it's headed!" AMEN!

[2 Macc. 7:1-2, 9-14; Psalm 17; 2 Thess. 2:16-3:5, 16-18; Luke 20:27-38]

Why is there no marriage in Heaven? One husband jokingly said, "So we husbands can finally get a little peace and quiet! Of course in the Gospel example, the woman does survive being married to seven husbands! So, you go, girl!

Another question: What is your understanding of the Resurrection? That's the question that Jesus indirectly poses when He challenges the Sadducees in this Sunday's Gospel reading. As Christians, we believe that someday we will experience a Resurrection like Christ's after we depart from this present earthly "age" or stage of life. All believers who follow Jesus will live as the angels do. This is why Catholic Funeral Masses are Resurrection Masses and use white instead of black as the liturgical color for the priest's vestments.

But do you believe in the Resurrection of Love? Jesus explains the Resurrection in terms of marriage. A marriage is supposed to be a reflection of God's radical love for His people. Marriage is supposed to unite one man and one woman in an enduring love that is the very presence of God. It gives witness to the world that God's faithfulness and commitment to us is real. Married spouses: do you reflect God's love and faithfulness to each other?

So why would Jesus say that marriage is not a part of the Resurrection of the Dead? Why won't today's marriages become perfect and continue forever after both husband and wife have entered Heaven? Because here on earth, love is imperfectly given and imperfectly received. Therefore, it's constantly dying and being resurrected again, every day, to the extent that each spouse repents and forgives. (The same is true of any good and healthy friendship.)

God is Perfect Love. We live as true children of God when we love our brothers and sisters the way God loves them. Marriage does not exist in Heaven because it's an imperfect love: We love our spouses more than we love others. In Heaven, we will love our spouses fully (yes, even our ex-spouses!) and we will love everyone else just as much. And those who have loved us poorly will love us better than the best spouse could love us now. Do we believe this?

Marriage is only an earthly foreshadowing of the divine, faithful, creative love that we will share with everyone in Heaven.

Who has failed to love you enough in this world? Who has caused you pain? How would you feel if that person were to greet you at the entrance of Heaven at the moment of your death? Would you have enough love for that person to get YOU through the door? How is a marriage like God's love? Think of the ways that God loves us, and relate these signs of true love to what you've experienced in good and healthy friendships. This a foretaste of Heaven!

Regarding our First Reading: 200 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, Jewish communities were just beginning to wonder about an afterlife. Until then, life was simply here. You were born, you die, and that's it. Eternity will rest only upon the good or bad reputation or legacy you leave behind. This is one of the reasons why buildings and financial foundations and trusts are named after people: they want to be remembered after they are gone. What legacy are we preparing to leave others?

The Maccabees brothers were part of the "resistance." They were part of several disparate Jewish groups who fought their current gentile enemies who dared to take over the Temple in Jerusalem – the Jewish equivalent of St. Peter's Basilica or the Basilica of St. John Lateran – and placed their own pagan altar over the altar of the Holy of Holies. On this altar, the gentiles sacrificed pork and forced their Jewish prisoners to eat it. Including the Maccabees family.

We hear in our First Reading the mother and brothers' decision to choose death rather than to violate the laws of the One True God. If you have a chance this week, read the full chapter 7 of 2 Maccabees, and savor the eloquent farewell speeches given by each of the seven brothers and their mother. Some of the speeches bring tears to my eyes. About forty years later, the Jews had another revolt, liberated Jerusalem and restored their Temple. Ironically, with the help of their future oppressors, the gentile Romans.

How strong is MY confidence in God, and what would I be willing to sacrifice for my convictions? My security, perhaps; but the safety of my children? The Maccabees story goes as far as humanly imaginable to pose that question.

The Sadducees, unfortunately, moved in as the elite class of the wealthy and the religious and were pushing their agenda over that of Jesus. They wanted to push back their religion, denying the existence and the reality of angels, the reality of an eternal soul, and believed only in the first five books of the Old Testament. They denied the development of Jewish theology and wanted to bring Jesus into the argument. While they asked Jesus a petty and nonsensical question, Jesus, quoting a verse from one the first five books of the Bible, frustrates their trap. Always remember this: whenever the enemies of Jesus try to trip Him up, He always knows what is in their hearts, he gives an answer that defeats them, and they have nothing to say except, "Well said, Teacher!"

In this month of November, when we reflect upon death and judgment, Heaven and Hell, Jesus tells us that the next life will not be a continuation of this present life. If we are faithful in this life, a fuller and forever relationship with God awaits us. Dare I say that we become "BFF's" – Best Friends Forever, in Heaven.

St. Paul in today's Second Reading has to evolve in HIS thinking about things as well. In his FIRST Letter to the Thessalonians, he thinks that the return of Jesus is imminent. He thinks that some of his fellow believers will not die, but will be alive at the time of the Second Coming. But by his SECOND letter, he changes his thinking and encourages the people to continue living their full and active lives, not just sitting around waiting for Jesus.

Like Pope Francis, St. Paul asks the people to pray for him and for his ministry, knowing that things will be getting worse before they get better. Actually, things only get worse for Paul. But God's grace and the prayerful support of Christian believers carry him through, and us as well.

Then he reminds them – and us – what Saint Pope John Paul II said about you good people: "You laypersons who possess faith, have a unique opportunity and a crucial responsibility. In your lives and through your daily activities, you show the power that faith has to transform the world and to renew the human family." In other words, folks, YOU are an unstoppable force for goodness and life in a world where evil and death seem to have the upper hand.

And that is very good news! If it is to be, it is up to me! AMEN!

[Readings: Wisdom 1:1-7; Psalm 139; Luke 17:1-6]

What wonderful and providential readings we have given to us by the Universal Catholic Church! They have been selected and prepared for Monday of the 32nd Week in Ordinary Time, but also speak to today's national and civil observance of Veteran's Day. We start with the beginning of the Book of Wisdom, the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit. We move to the Responsorial Psalm 139, which is my favorite Psalm of all the psalms in the Book of Psalms, because it reminds me of my awesome origins in the mind and in the creative power of God. We then move to the Gospel passage from Luke, shining a light on sin, forgiveness and faith. How does all of this fit in with today's observance?

Back on October 31st, Halloween of all days, Pope Francis met with military chaplains from around the world as they participated in a formation course on international humanitarian law hosted by the Vatican.

He said, "Dear Ordinaries and military chaplains: as you carry out your mission to form the consciences of the members of the armed forces, I encourage you to spare no effort to enable the norms of international humanitarian law to be accepted in the hearts of those entrusted to your pastoral care... The Second Vatican Council calls those in military service 'custodians of the security and freedom of their people.' The servants of Christ in the military world are also the first to be at the service of men and women and of their fundamental rights." Pope Francis said that war prisoners have been subject to violations of their human dignity, including abuse, violence, cruelty treatment, and various forms of "inhuman and degrading" torture.

"The ethical foundation and crucial importance of these norms for safeguarding human dignity in the tragic context of armed conflicts means that they must be properly and rigorously respected and enforced," he added.

"Respect for the dignity and physical integrity of the human person, in fact, cannot depend upon the actions they have done, but is a moral duty to which every person and every authority is called," Pope Francis said.

Today the Church celebrates the memorial of St. Martin of Tours, bishop. St. Martin is the first bishop and confessor honored by the Church in the West.

St. Martin was born (c. 316) at Sabaria, a town in Pannonia near the famous Benedictine monastery dedicated to his name. Against the wishes of his parents he associated with Christians and became a catechumen at the age of ten. At fifteen he entered the army and served under the Emperors Constantius and Julian. While in the service he met a poor, naked beggar at the gates of Amiens who asked alms in Christ's Name. Martin had nothing with him except his weapons and soldier's mantle; but he took his sword, cut the latter in two, and gave half to the poor man. During the following night Christ appeared to him clothed with half a mantle and said, "Martin, the catechumen, has clothed Me with this mantle!"

Martin was eighteen years old when he received the sacrament of holy baptism. At the pleading of his superior officer, he remained two years longer in the army. Then, upon requesting dismissal, Julian accused him of cowardice. "With the sign of the Cross," Martin answered, "I shall more certainly break through the ranks of the enemy than if armed with shield and sword."

Martin also possessed the gift of discerning spirits. With these gifts, Martin founded a monastery at Liguge', France, where he lived a monastic life. He was ordained a priest and became bishop of Tours. He founded more monasteries, trained clergy and preached the Gospel to the poor. He died in 397.

Through his intercession as a military veteran, we pray:

Father of the human family, Prince of Peace, and Spirit of Wisdom,
We ask for blessings on all those who have served their country in the
armed forces.

We ask for healing for the veterans who have been wounded,
in body mind and soul, in conflicts around the globe.

We pray especially for the young men and women, in the thousands,
who are coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan with injured

bodies and traumatized spirits.

Bring solace to them, O Lord;

may we pray for them when they cannot pray.

We ask for an end to wars and the dawning of a new era of peace,

as a way to honor all the veterans of past wars.

Have mercy on all our veterans.

Bring peace to their hearts and peace to the regions they fought in.

Bless all the soldiers who served in non-combative posts;

May their calling to service continue in their lives in many positive ways.

Give us all the creative vision to see a world which,

grown weary with fighting,

moves to affirming the life of every human being

and so moves beyond war.

Hear our prayer, O Prince of Peace, hear our prayer.

O God, we are thankful for all who have served in protecting our country.

Give them an abundance of your blessings.

Continue to watch over and protect those

who are still in active military service.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Readings: Mal. 3:19-20a; Psalm 98; 2 Thess. 3:7-12; Luke 21:5-19]

It's coming. The end of time. The apocalypse. Judgment Day. That's what our readings point to. Actually, quite soberly, the readings point to the day and the moment when we breathe our last breath. Should we dread it? Should we be fearful? Should we be annoyed? Or should we be overjoyed?

The answer to THAT question is easy. It depends on how deep your faith is. It depends on your relationship with Jesus Christ. It depends on your status with the Church. How you are in these three departments will govern your reaction to the reality of the end of our personal time on earth. As the expression goes, are you ready to "meet your Maker?"

To the disciples of Jesus, the Temple of Jerusalem was bedrock. Nothing could bring down these walls. The smallest stones in the structure weighed 2 to 3 tons. Many of them weighed 50 tons. The largest existing stone is 12 yards in length and 3 yards high and it weighed hundreds of tons! The stones were so immense that neither mortar nor any other binding material was used between the stones. Their stability was attained by the great weight of the stones. The walls towered over Jerusalem, over 400 feet in one area. Inside the four walls was 45 acres of bedrock which were shaved flat, and during Jesus' day a quarter of a million people could fit comfortably within the structure.

By comparison, the walls of this church go up only about 35 feet, and the buildings that make up our parish plant – the church, the

parish center and the rectory, sit only on 10 acres, versus 45 acres for the Temple of Jerusalem.

You can then understand the disciple's surprise. They want to hear more.

Jesus' prediction that a structure so immense would be leveled to the ground seemed impossible. But they pressed Jesus for more information.

In their voice was fear. Fear that their lives were about to change forever. Jesus had not made any predictions like this one. This was different. This, they could understand. Forty years later Jesus' prediction came true. In 70 AD the Temple was destroyed by Rome. Of course, it wasn't much of a stretch for Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke probably was written ten years AFTER the Temple was destroyed! Still, what are we to learn from this prediction and its fulfillment?

The Bedrock of Faith is not in temples. The Bedrock of Faith is not in signs. The Bedrock of Faith is in Christ alone.

How do we live with this knowledge? Some grow cynical about the humanity of the human race. Others succumb to depression, anxiety, or a life circumscribed by fear. We can give up, give in, or behave like the Thessalonians: party hearty today, for tomorrow we die!

Even prophets like Malachi who envision the day of the Lord as a severe hour of reckoning don't throw in the towel on history altogether. After their return from exile and the rebuilding of the Temple, the Israelites have become lukewarm in their faith. Their animal sacrifices in the temple were animals that were imperfect,

stolen or diseased. Their financial offerings were meager. Malachi gives them a wake-up call to conversion or else! There is a ray of hope for those who repent, change their lifestyles and live faithfully for the rest of their lives.

Jesus says that the day will come when not one stone of the temple will be left mortared to another, because it will all be torn down. He's reminding us that everything here on earth is temporary.

Goodness will last forever and badness has an expiration date tied to this world. What continues to motivate us in the face of the darkest seasons is the brilliant light of justice always on the horizon. The only way to get there is to go there. This is no time to give in to the gloom brought on by corrupt leaders – whoever they are -- and destructive decisions. Justice waits on our courage to take the journey toward its “healing rays.”

The presence of evil, Jesus says, leads to our giving testimony: When bad things happen, we're required to raise our voices. We're called to answer the lies of our generation with truth. We confront villainy with values. We say no to fear, and yes to courage.

So... How deep is your faith? Describe a time in your life that felt apocalyptic: destructive, chaotic, transforming, final. What had to be surrendered, and what came to life through that experience?

What is your relationship with Jesus Christ? What is your status with the Church? Will we greet His return with fear or with joy?

Apocalypses begin and end in the heart of each believer. The journey toward divine revelation is an interior trek. The dark night of the soul is nothing less than the battle of the good and evil within us. We try to be loving people; honest in our business dealings and

service to the community; faithful to our friends and family; prayerful and thankful to God for the goodness and mercy we receive each day. But even with the most rigorous spiritual discipline, we cannot avoid the fight for our soul. And as Jesus advises us, we cannot prepare our testimony in advance, because we have no way to know when the battle will begin or what will trigger it.

Make no mistake though, at some point you will find yourself fighting the good fight against apathy, anger, doubt, pride, resentment, or greed. You will feel unhappy, unappreciated, and unloved. It will be a hellish time, but don't despair. On the other side of your trials awaits a loving God Who will welcome you, embrace you, and reward you for your faithfulness. AMEN!

[Readings: 2 Sam 5:1-3; Ps. 122; Col 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43]

Can you believe that this Thursday is Thanksgiving Day already? I'm still stuck in September. As we gather around the dinner table on Thursday, we will eat turkey or ham and maybe walk on egg shells. We may pass the yams and walk around mine fields. In other words, we may enjoy the holiday as best we can with the people we are with! It is said that at family gatherings, it may be best to avoid topics regarding politics and religion, especially this year! If that's true, then I would be out of a job!

While the most recent Election Day is behind us, it'll be no time at all before our televisions once again will be taken over by the threats and promises of politicians. If we don't vote for this candidate, then the world will fall apart. But, if we vote for the right person, then salvation is at hand.

The equation of politics with salvation should be troubling for Catholics. Certainly, the common good is definitively at stake in these elections. The unborn must be protected against abortion; the poor must be cared for by society; racism must be fought against; immigrants must be protected against injustice and violence; and above all, religious freedom should be respected.

Politicians should promote the common good as best as they can determine as limited creatures, incapable of knowing the results of all their actions. If they don't, it's the job of us Catholics to take them to task for this negligence. Nonetheless, this or that politician will not save us. They can't.

Human beings suffer from a deeper malaise than the politician can respond to. We suffer from what St. Augustine calls the lust for domination. We don't only want to be right or prudent. We want to be in charge. We want to be God.

The solemnity of Christ the King is a prophetic day in the United States, especially as contentious election cycles loom. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is mocked by those obsessed with the lust for domination. The soldiers mock Him, asking Him to reveal his power. The rulers sneer, "If you're so great, save yourself!"

In the Gospel of Luke, it's only the good thief who recognizes the actual source of real power. He turns to Christ, the only source of salvation, asking to be remembered when our Lord Jesus comes into the kingdom. He professes faith in Jesus as the savior -- not Pilate, not his fellow thief, not even those who could release him from his suffering. Jesus Christ alone is king.

Catholics who engage in the public square would be wise to commit ourselves to the kingship of Jesus. This politician or that politician -- they won't save us. Jesus Christ alone is King. And that ironically gives us our power. We stand in the public square and acknowledge the politics of this age, dominated by suspicion and violence, by polling rather than the pursuit of truth, which is a symptom of the lust for domination. It's evidence that we're sick in our sins. Something's wrong.

So it with the Israelites in today's First Reading. Even when Saul, his predecessor was king, it was David who called the shots. The elders of the tribes of Israel knew it was David who really wore the crown and signed the checks, so to speak. Saul fell on his sword rather than surrender to the Philistines. Saul's three sons were already dead and gone, killed in battle. We would see David "anointed" two other times, by the tribes of Judah and then by those of Israel. He would be the "King of Kings" -- at least for our Old Testament Hebrew ancestors! David knew that the king was responsible for two tasks: to lead and to feed. The people are to be fed with the truth; they are to be led into fruitful action energized by the truth. The same is true for parents and all in authority. The seeming efficiency of dictatorship is enticing at times to every leader of individuals and groups -- even pastors! But true leadership is a byproduct of true faith. Faith moves one to lead humbly, by example and with love. David had such faith, and despite his many faults and failings, he returned to his faith regularly and became the model for all future kings of Judah and Israel. Death brings life. Faithfulness in suffering brings true and lasting freedom and peace, as we see with Jesus Himself on the cross. Alone. Abandoned. Naked. Humiliated. From all worldly assessments, one big, fat failure. A loser.

And, the Church tells us today, He is a King. In fact, the NEW King of

Kings! And yet, at the moment of His apparent ultimate failure -- death -- someone is hanging around next to Him saying, "I believe in You. I want to live with You when Your Kingdom finally arrives." And Jesus turns to him in love and says, "You will. You will be with me this day in Paradise."

On this last Sunday of the liturgical year, we stand on the edge of Paradise; we look through the Doorway of Heaven. All we have to do -- and it is no small thing -- is to put our hurts and slights into perspective. To drop our demand for restitution and vengeance. To realize our need to be re-created in the love of God. That our crosses lead us to crowns. In the shadow of the Cross, we are able to finally admit our need for healing, for peace, for God. In acknowledging our own need to forgive and to be forgiven, to love and to be loved, to minister and to be ministered to, Christ's promise of Paradise is ours.

We have lots to give thanks for on Thursday, Thanksgiving Day. Join us if you can for Mass at 9:30 AM with the special collection envelopes going towards our Christian Service outreach. And then afterwards, what?

Here's an idea. This Thursday, as we gather around in our living room, dining room, family room or restaurant, if we should find ourselves discussing religion or politics, let us do it not with anger and emotion, but with compassion and with curiosity. Compassion -- to speak in respectful tones and volumes. To try to look at the topic from the opposite point of view, and to identify its flaws.

And curiosity -- to discover why others take the opposite view from us.

Then to move beyond the differences to see what they may have in common, the shared values upon which we can build. To build bridges and not walls. To respect the basic decency of each other as made in the image, the icon, of God. And to enjoy a full and tasty meal in the process!

The solution won't be found through those who bear the mark of the elephant or the donkey. It will only be found in the self-giving love of the God-man, Jesus Christ, who forgives sin, transferring us from the age of darkness into the kingdom of light and peace. Come, Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe!

[Readings: Sirach 50:22-24; Psalm 67; 1 Cor. 1:3-9; Luke 17:11-19]

It's a story of sacrifice and survival; partnership and progress.

It was our country's very first Thanksgiving.

Imagine the challenges the first settlers endured in 1620. They left everyone they knew and everything that was familiar. The Mayflower carried 102 voyagers across the Atlantic on a 66-day journey full of sickness and storms. That winter, nearly half of the voyagers died from disease and lack of shelter.

Yet, when the harvest season arrived, they set aside three full days to give thanks. In spite of the hardships, there was still much to be grateful for. They were alive. They were welcomed as strangers into a new land. The natives taught them how to grow their own crops. They had food to eat and friends to share it with. And... they had religious freedom, which is the very reason they came.

The settlers' simple decision to be intentionally grateful led to centuries of Americans doing the same every November.

Let's be real though. In some seasons of life, being grateful is just plain hard. We find ourselves overwhelmed with circumstances and underwhelmed with relationships. With preoccupied minds and aching hearts, it goes against our nature to give thanks anyway. But that's exactly what the Lord asks of us.

Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. [1 Thessalonians 5:18.](#)

But...

How can we give thanks if we lost our job?

How can we give thanks if we've been diagnosed with a disease?

How can we give thanks if we can't conceive?

How can we give thanks if our friend refuses to talk to us?

How can we give thanks if we are spending the holidays alone...again?

How can we give thanks if our marriage is falling apart?

How can we give thanks if our child is suffering?

How can we give thanks if we lost a loved one?

How can we give thanks if we don't know what the future holds?

Because even though we are struggling, our God is still sacred.

In each difficult situation, our Creator gives us glimpses of hope in a sacred silver lining. It's the place where God is working all things together for good. It's where the hidden blessings are stored. They aren't always easy to find, but they're always there.

The secret to giving thanks in all circumstances is to find His sacred lining.

We will find His sacred lining when we give thanks for what we do have, instead of complaining about what we don't have. *Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.* [Philippians 4:11-13.](#)

We will find His sacred lining when we give thanks for what is right instead of worrying about what is wrong. *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.* [Philippians 4:6-7.](#)

We will find His sacred lining when we give thanks for the process instead of grumbling about the problem.

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love. [Romans 5:3-5.](#)

We will find His sacred lining when we give thanks to God first.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. [Psalm 118:1.](#)

Before we gather around the table this year, gobbling up turkey and a slice of pumpkin pie, let's be intentional about giving thanks no matter what. We can

be personal about it by starting [a gratitude journal](#), or we can share it with others in a prayer before dinner. Yes, circumstances can be challenging. Yes, relationships can be broken. But we serve a God who is for us, not against us. There is a holy gift waiting for us amidst the hardship. Let's look hard for His sacred lining and give thanks to God when we find it, not just on Thanksgiving, but every day. AMEN!