

[Readings: Sirach 50:22-24, Psalm 138, 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.

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 cannot 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 God 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.

We will find His sacred lining when we give thanks for what is right instead of complaining about what is wrong.

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

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

Before we gather around the table this year, and there may be fewer around the table because of sickness or death, let's be intentional about giving thanks no matter what. We can be personal about 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.

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This Thanksgiving Day, we gather here today because we want to give thanks, even in the midst of the struggles, the burdens and the crosses we are currently carrying. Regardless of our station in life: ordained, consecrated religious, single, married, separated or divorced, we come to this "Thanksgiving Table" to give thanks and praise to God.

Did you know that the more we say "thank you" the healthier we become? It is a scientifically proven fact that if we say "thank you" to God for not only the big things in life but also for the daily little things, we actually become healthier.

Nobody likes feeling taken for granted. And yet, we all take people, and things, and opportunities, and even God for granted from time to time.

As we begin Advent this Sunday, I would like to issue a gratitude challenge. Every day for the next 30 days, I challenge you to do two things:

1. Take two minutes to reflect on all you have to be grateful for. Two minutes goes by awfully slow when you turn all the noisemakers off – the ear pods, the TV, the cell phone. After two minutes, or after only one minute, if it's really driving you crazy, simply thank God in your own words.

2. With that “attitude of gratitude,” express your gratitude to someone in your life. Simply say, “thank you” to at least one person each day, and make a mental note of who that person was.

Do these two things each day for the next month, and you will be amazed how these simple exercises can have such a powerful impact on your life and relationships.

As we thank God in a world that seems to be falling down around us with no hope, let us once again thank Him for who we are and for what we have, that our spiritual faith may lead to true and lasting freedom, and that we may draw ever closer to Him and to one another. AMEN!

A THANKSGIVING POEM

May your stuffing be tasty,
May your turkey plump,
May your potatoes and gravy
have nary a lump.
May your yams be delicious
and your pies take the prize,
and may your
Thanksgiving dinner
stay off your thighs!

