

[Readings: Deut. 6:2-6; Psalm 18; Romans 6:3-9; Mark 12:28-34]

(From [Lauren Woodrell, the Magis Center](#))

All Souls Day, observed on November 2, is a profound Catholic feast dedicated to honoring and praying for the souls of the dead, particularly those in purgatory. While All Saints Day (also known as All Hallows Day, the day after All Hallows Eve) on November 1 celebrates the Saints in Heaven, All Souls Day focuses on those still undergoing purification, offering a chance for the living to assist through prayers and indulgences. That is what brings us to church today, reflecting the Church's enduring belief in the Communion of Saints and Eternal Life. And the enduring connection between the living and the dead.

All Souls Day is marked by meaningful Catholic traditions such as attending Mass, offering prayers for souls in purgatory, and lighting candles to remember the dead. Many also visit cemeteries to honor loved ones, often-bringing flowers, gifts, and food to gravesites. These customs, deeply rooted in Catholic belief, symbolize hope, prayer, and the ongoing spiritual connection between the living and the departed.

Attending Mass on All Souls Day is one of the most important traditions in Catholic communities. Special prayers, including the Funeral Mass, are offered for the souls of the deceased, especially those believed to be in Purgatory. These prayers are seen as a way to help cleanse the souls of their sins and aid in their journey toward heaven. Catholics also believe that offering prayers and masses can ease the suffering of the souls in Purgatory, which underscores the day's spiritual significance.

That is what brings us here today. To gather in faith and in prayerful support for you who have lost a loved one to death, and for whom we pray for Eternal Life. All Souls Day reminds us of the enduring bond between the living and the dead, grounded in love and spiritual support. All Souls Day offers comfort and hope, reminding us of the eternal peace that awaits in the presence of God.

But All Souls Day is not just about remembering and praying for the dead -- it's also an opportunity for personal spiritual growth and acts of charity. Engaging in reflective acts such as fasting or silent prayer allows the faithful to contemplate life, death, and the Christian hope of Resurrection. Some people choose to read passages from the Bible or meditate on the Four Last Things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

Are YOU ready to meet the Lord?

How does this move you to greater charity to those in need, to those in your family? Acts of charity are encouraged to honor the dead while helping the living. Offering alms, volunteering, or supporting those in need reflects the Christian values of love and mercy. In some Catholic communities, it is expected to give food to the poor or make donations in the name of deceased loved ones. These acts of generosity not only commemorate the dead but also demonstrate compassion for others, living out the teachings of Christ.

Jesus calls us to grow, to be challenged in what the deepest meaning of life is. So what does He teach us? He teaches us what it means to be a Disciple until we are called into Eternity. This involves two steps.

Step One is to *Love God first, with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength*. Jesus reveals to us who God is. God's heart is made known to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, as we hear in the Second Reading, “offered himself” for us. God loves us to such a degree that He holds nothing back from us. His love for us is radical and intense.

And because God’s gift to us is limitless – *ALL of Himself* – God can ask for ALL of us: our heart – the place of our decision-making and our soul. Your mind – what you fill your mind with; the study and knowledge of God! And your strength – loving God is a battle against temptation.

Step Two is to *Love your neighbor as yourself*. St. John tells us, “Whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1Jn 4:20). Because Jesus willingly gave Himself up for others, we are called to love them in deed, as well.

And, now, a brief word about Tuesday’s election. How many have already sent in their absentee ballot? How many are planning to vote in person early or on Election Day, November 5, 2024?

The Michigan Catholic Conference continues its voter education efforts to urge the faithful to vote with a conscience informed by the truths of Church teaching. The MCC has been sharing its election edition of Focus magazine directly with Lansing Update readers. This edition was shared as insert in the bulletin a couple of weeks ago. A few copies are still available in the back of the church, along with the current monthly issue of Right to Life.

It can be challenging to compare Catholic teaching with the positions espoused by candidates for office.

Neither of the country’s two major political party platforms adhere to the full range of Catholic teaching. Making these voting decisions is sometimes discouraging. But Catholics are called as Disciples of Christ to be a light in the world and to guide others toward the righteous path.

Pray often, letting faith inform political participation. Keep learning.

The Church cannot and will not tell individuals which presidential or Michigan-based candidate they should vote for. Such decisions are to be made after forming one's conscience based on the teachings of the Church and prayerful reflection of candidate positions.

It is up to all Catholics and people of goodwill to do the best they can to make wise judgments about the candidates and the issues.

I encourage you all to read the entirety of Focus and take advantage of the resources at MCC's election website.

Everything else is in God's hands.

And Moses spoke to the people, saying: "Fear the Lord, your God, and keep throughout the days of your lives, all his statutes and commandments... that you may grow and prosper the more, in keeping with the promise of the Lord... to give you a land flowing with milk and honey." And Jesus replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength... And you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

May God keep us faithful to His teachings as we put His Words into action with courageous hearts and lives. May Mary, Queen of All Saints, may our brothers and sisters in Purgatory, and one another here present, pray together that God's will be done on Tuesday. AMEN!

[Readings: Deut. 6:2-6; Ps.18; Heb. 7:23-28; Mark 12:28-34]

Jesus calls us to grow; to be challenged in what the deepest meaning of life is. So what does He teach us? He teaches us what it means to be a disciple; this involves two steps.

Step One is to: *Love God first, with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength.* Jesus reveals to us who God is. God's heart is made known to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

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And because God's gift to us is limitless – *ALL of Himself* – God can ask for ALL of us: our heart – the place of our decision-making and our soul – with our eternal destination in mind. Your mind – what you fill your mind with; the study and knowledge of God! And your strength – loving God is a battle against temptation; it requires a fight!

Step Two is to: *Love your neighbor as yourself.* St. John tells us, "Whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." (1Jn 4:20). Disciples are called to follow Jesus; to love the people He loved. And He loved everyone. Because Jesus willingly gave Himself up for others, we are called to love them in deed, as well.

With the election quickly approaching, the Michigan Catholic Conference continues its voter education efforts to urge the faithful to vote with a conscience informed by the truths of Church teaching.

To further advance this message, MCC has been sharing its election edition of Focus magazine directly with Lansing Update

readers. This edition was shared as insert in the bulletin a couple of weeks ago. A few copies are still available in the back of the church.

It can be challenging to compare Catholic teaching – which was shared in last week’s installment, and which can also be found here -- with the positions espoused by candidates for office.

Neither of the country’s two major political party platforms adhere to the full range of Catholic teaching.

Making these voting decisions is sometimes discouraging. But Catholics are called as Disciples of Christ to be a light in the world and to guide others toward the righteous path.

While it is important to spend time researching the candidates and the issues, putting on the mind of Christ before voting also necessitates stepping away from the noise through the election cycle.

Does cable news political commentary or social media discourse help inform a Catholic perspective? Take time away from media and spend time with Holy Scripture and the Blessed Sacrament. Turn off the TV and the podcast and listen in silence. Pray often, letting faith inform political participation.

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May God keep us faithful to His teachings as we put His Words into action with courageous hearts and lives. May Mary, Queen of All Saints, the Immaculate Conception, may our brothers and sisters in Purgatory, and one another here present, pray together that God's will be done on Tuesday. AMEN!

[Readings: 1 Kings 17:10-16; Ps. 146; Heb. 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44]

Alice Camille is a religious educator, scripture commentator, and author of many books. Including a weekly Sunday homily service, one of several which I use to prepare my homilies. She shares this memory, triggered by today's Gospel passage about the widow and her two coins.

What's the value of two grapefruits? If you've been to the supermarket lately, you might be able to come up with the cost in a dollar or two. If it's the off-season for citrus, you'll probably pay a bit more -- and not necessarily like what you get. But if you pay more than, say, \$5 for any piece of fruit, then you probably have enough money in your pocket not to care about the price of things at all. If you have that kind of fiscal leisure, and you give me an expensive piece of fruit, I'll happily eat it and be appreciative. But I won't think you gave out of your poverty.

Once, however, I received two pieces of grapefruit from the tree in a woman's yard. The tree was bowed heavily with fruit and it was indeed the season. The fruit, one could argue, was free for the taking, because God was primarily responsible for the yield. But because the tree grew behind the woman's house, it was her tree and she was selling the fruit -- a dozen grapefruit for a dollar! Even in season that's an extreme bargain, so I eagerly paid the dollar. Who wouldn't?

But you should have seen her house -- falling down, door broken, yard choked with unmown grass. And you should have seen the woman herself: elderly, crippled, clearly unable to keep up with the place and with no one to help her.

The sale of her fruit would buy her dinner -- or not. Cheap as it was, this was some of the most precious grapefruit in the world.

The woman took my dollar, and I bagged up the fruit, feeling like a criminal. When I'd chosen my 12 pieces, the woman reached up and plucked two more grapefruit and topped off my bag. "For your trouble," she said. I cried all the way home, clutching the holiest, and most expensive fruit since the Garden of Eden.

The Bible tells us that God is revealed in jars of flour that don't go empty, jugs of oil that never run dry. God is present in the widow who gives up her last two coins to the collection plate and a boy's lunch that winds up feeding a multitude. God can be found in thin wafers of bread and a sip of wine that won't resolve the average growling stomach but can provide everlasting life.

You may want to rationalize away some of these things, or perhaps you find it hard to believe even one of them. But I believe them all. And I believe one more: that God once gave me two pieces of grapefruit that I didn't pay for, to remind me that everything else in my life came free too. And God help me but I took it.

My friends, in giving her two coins, the widow gets nothing in return. There will be no invitation to a dinner honoring those who have donated. She will not get her name on a building in the Temple complex. And yet, it is the poor widow who has given everything. She has given her whole self in giving away all she has.

Remember that contestant on the game show "Jeopardy" who waged everything he had on a Daily Double question? James Holzhauer. He would push his hands away from him in a gesture that said, "I'm all in."

That's what donating the two coins to the Temple treasury symbolized. It means that the widow is "all in."

Jesus' observation of the widow has its roots in today's Old Testament First Reading. A widow gives drink and feeds Elijah. She has nothing. But through her generosity to a prophet of God, her flour and oil do not go dry for a year. She is "all in."

This is what God wants from us. God wants us to give not out of our surplus, but out of our basic sustenance. God doesn't want us to give away everything we have; but God does want us to DEDICATE everything we have received from Him to His greater glory. He wants us to be "all in" with our time, talent and treasure. With all that we have, and all that we are.

It's not what's on the outside that counts; it's what is happening on the inside. Where is my heart? What are my intentions? What do I treasure? Where is YOUR heart? What are YOU intentions? What do YOU treasure the most in life?

Among the many prayers I say every morning, the Prayer of St. Ignatius Loyola fits in with the theme of today's readings:

"Take, Lord, receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my entire will." The more He takes my memory, the older I get, the more I am forgetting things! Memory, understanding and will all deal with the mind. We choose what we remember, what we learn, and what we do.

"Take, Lord, receive all I have and possess. You have given all to me, now I return it. Take, Lord, receive all is your now. Dispose of it, only according to your will. Give me only your love and your grace; that's enough for me."

This means that we don't save any part of ourselves for a rainy day. The Kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurates requires us to spend our whole selves. And if we do, God will give us more.

We must hold nothing back. Our sorrows. Our joys. Our weakness. It must be offered back in love to God.

After all, on the cross, it is Jesus who gives out of His nothingness. Out of His pain, His suffering, His condemnation by men and women, He gives everything. Jesus is "all in."

He is the Great High Priest of the Letter to the Hebrews, Who sacrifices Himself once and for all.

Think of a time when someone did something for you that was totally unexpected. It's a wonderful feeling to get help when you really need it or to have someone do a huge favor for you. To receive assistance from another person also involves giving up control and depending on another. To have such an experience calls forth a profound sense of gratitude. That's what Jesus did for the world. He gave himself for others so that all may live. All you have to do is accept that offer.

This week, may all of us pray that, like the widow, we will be "all in" -- Old and young. Rich and poor. Are YOU "all in?" AMEN!

[Readings: Titus 1:1-8; Psalm 24; 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 Letter of St. Paul to Titus. We move to the Responsorial Psalm 24, which speaks of the qualifications to "ascend the mountain of the Lord" – to merit a virtuous life, and then to merit Eternal Life. 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, 2019, 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, cruel 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 cape; but he took his sword, cut the cape in two, and gave half to the poor man. During the following night Christ appeared to him clothed with half a cape and said, "Martin, the catechumen, has clothed Me with this mantle!"

Martin was eighteen years old when he received the Sacrament of 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 military service
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
positive ways.

Give us all the creative vision to see a world which,
grown weary with fighting, moves to affirming 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 Your blessings.

Continue to watch over and protect those
who are still in active military service.

St. Michael the Archangel, patron saint of those in military service,
defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and
snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do
thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, cast into
hell Satan and the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the
ruin of souls.

AMEN!

[Readings: Dan. 12:1-3; Ps.16; Heb.10:11-14, 18; Mark 13:24-32]

Some of the bumper stickers and rear windshields we see on the road are inappropriate and even obscene. There are two bumper stickers I saw which address today's theme of the Day of the Lord's Second Coming at the end of time and the General Judgment of humanity. It simply says, "Jesus is coming! Look busy!" Another sticker says, "Jesus is coming, and BOY is He ticked off!"

Divine Judgment is real. Our Catholic faith tells us this in the Profession of Faith we proclaim every Sunday: "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead." "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." We call it Heaven. But there is also a state of existence called Hell. I believe that we have had a taste of both here on earth.

When we are at absolute peace with God in our hearts, when we experience the love, the joy and the laughter of each other, when we sacrifice and give of ourselves so much that it hurts, when our pets love us unconditionally and our friends are there for us, this is only a taste of what Heaven is like.

But when we experience hate, abuse, abandonment and alienation; when we are misunderstood, rejected and shunned by others whom we trusted and loved and thought loved us; when our hearts ache following the death of a child, a spouse, a parent, a dear friend; when we do not seem to have any purpose in life, and all life seems to be one great empty waste; when there is no hope, no health, no income, and no one around who loves us, this is a taste of Hell. Somewhere in between is Purgatory, a place and state of cleansing to get us ready to meet God face to face.

Now take both experiences of Heaven and Hell on earth, and multiply it by eternity, by infinity. Put God into this equation and we can conclude that one day we will be either eternally happy or eternally full of the unending pain of the anxiety of separation from God. Spoiler alert! The choice is not God's. The judgment is not God's. The choice is ours. And we bring judgment upon ourselves. This too can be Heaven or Hell.

Jesus speaks of the great tribulation in today's Gospel, but believe it or not, this is not a gloom and doom prophecy. It is a message of hope. Jesus calls these apocalyptic, end-of-the-world special effects the "beginning of the birth pangs." All of creation will just be going into labor.

It is time for the Great Birth to take place. This is the moment of the Resurrection of the Dead.

This is what Catholic theology calls the Day of Judgment.

A whole series of books was written based on the prediction of Jesus Christ saying in the Gospel of Luke that, "one will be taken, the other will be left behind." The series inspired the fictional "Left Behind" series. These books imply that the souls of the just will be taken from earth in the middle of its earthly existence, with the poor lost souls battling Satan for power here on earth.

I imagine myself standing next to someone who I care about deeply, who is suddenly and unexpectedly pulled up into Heaven, leaving me behind. I look up to Heaven and say, "Aw, Man..."

But Jesus is speaking of the last days. The "Rapture" as some call it, again, with no actual basis in Scripture, will not happen as they think in earth time, but at the end of time. When Jesus returns, and get this -- time and space are over. There will be no more time or space. So when the Lord comes at the end of time, you might call it our Second Birthday, or the Day of Our Rebirth. Jesus says in the Gospel of John when He tells His disciples "I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you (John 16:21-22)."

Everything financial and material that we attach ourselves to so dearly in this world is moving in the natural direction of its mortal limits. Finances and material goods will be destroyed. If we believe that there's more to life than this life, then we need to give attention to that world beyond this world. The fig tree's lesson is so simple, perhaps it takes a child to understand it.

Famous secular prophets and political pundits have predicted that when we engage in World War III, it will begin with unrest in the Middle East. Look around us and around the world to see if that is not in fact happening now.

So far, the Doomsday prophets predicted the end of the world three times. Remember Y2K? Everything was going to ruin on January 1, 2000. Here we are twenty-three years later. The next time would be October, 2011.

Three years ago, the latest false prediction was December 8th. So, I told people to get their affairs in order! I've had my affairs in order for quite a while now. On December 9 of 2021, when Armageddon didn't happen, I went out and had a big breakfast!

Make no mistake. God's Word tells us that the human community -- nations and kingdoms -- will break down. Check. Already happening. Then the earth will stop yielding food and begin to shake apart. Check. Global warming, whether you believe it or not. Next, the family will be torn apart from within. Check. That's already been happening for 60 years! Then the last faithful individuals will be persecuted. Check. Look at what our government is doing to us Catholics and Christian believers. There were more executions of Christians and Catholics in the 20th Century than in all the prior 19 Centuries combined!

Finally, the Temple will be desecrated, and the earth will be emptied of God's presence. Check. There have been 2,400 attacks on Christian and Catholic Churches in Europe alone. That doesn't count the 400 attacks on our Catholic Churches here in the United States. For now, sacrileges and desecrations abound in our Church. But God is still with His people!

When Jesus says, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place, He means it WILL take place -- the day that you and I will die, the day that you and I will breathe our last natural breath. Reading the Signs of the Times may lead us to think that the return of the Lord is imminent, near, at hand. In one way that should scare us, but only if we are not ready and prepared to meet Him.

The last few people I have given the Last Rites to inspire me with their readiness to meet the Lord. Three months ago, I heard the best comment yet, from an elderly woman, after I gave her Viaticum -- the Sacrament that literally means, "Going with you." She thanked me and then said, "I'm ready... Let's roll!" These were the final words of the heroic plane passengers who went down in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, trying to thwart the terrorists who took over their plane. Are YOU "ready to roll?" AMEN!

[Readings: Daniel 7:13-14; Ps. 93; Rev. 1:5-8; John 18:33b-37]

On the last Sunday of the liturgical year, Catholics celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King. A relative newcomer to the Church calendar -- established only 100 years ago -- this feast is designed to give special recognition to the dominion Christ our Lord has over all aspects of our lives. But why and how did it come about? And why is it so important?

When Cardinal Ambrogio Achille Ratti was elected pope and took the name Pope Pius XI, much of the world was in shambles. The year was 1922, and while the bloodletting of World War I (1914-1918) had ended, widespread peace and tranquility were not evident.

The “War to End All Wars” had been especially devastating to England and the countries of continental Europe. Governments were in economic chaos, unemployment was rampant and people in many places were starving to death.

Pessimism, a sense of helplessness compounded by hatred among the nations, was overwhelming. The time was ripe for the rise of tyrants, and rise they did. Pope Pius XI’s predecessor, Pope Benedict XV, had warned about this prophetically in 1920 when he wrote, “There can be no stable peace or lasting treaties, though made after long and difficult negotiations and duly signed, unless there be a return of mutual charity.”

The Book of Ecclesiastes says that “there is nothing new under the sun.” All of these things I just mentioned that happened 100 years ago are still happening in our world – and our country -- today.

In all these developments, the new Pope Pius XI saw that people were denying Christ in favor of a lifestyle dominated by secularism, material advantage and false hope created by the tyrants. He realized that he had to address the political and economic forces that were crowding out the kingship of Jesus. As a start, he dedicated his reign and motto as pope to “The Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ” (*Pax Christi in Regno Christi*). Pope Pius constantly emphasized the kingship of Christ as declared in the Creed: “His kingdom will have no end.”

On Dec. 11, 1925, the pope issued the encyclical *Quas Primas* (“In the First”) which added the feast of “Our Lord Jesus Christ the King” to the annual Church liturgical calendar. More than 340 religious leaders had asked for this feast day. In 1969, Pope Paul VI changed the name of the celebration to the feast we now know as “Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.” He also changed the date to the last Sunday in the liturgical year and its rank of celebration to that of a “solemnity.”

Today, peace still eludes us; social, political and economic orders are shaking; and the nations continue in many ways to reject the light of the Gospel. We can be grateful, then, for the chance to celebrate each year the Solemnity of Christ the King -- for the world needs now, more than ever, our witness to His rule over all things.

Sir Thomas Moore, sentenced to death by King Henry VIII of England, said on the day of his execution and martyrdom, “I die the King’s servant, but God’s servant first.”

What does His Kingship look like? Pope Benedict XVI says this: “It is not the power of the kings or the great people of this world; it is the divine power to give eternal life, to liberate from evil, to defeat the dominion of death. It is the power of Love that can draw well from evil that can melt a hardened heart, bring peace amid the harshest conflict and kindle hope in the thickest darkness.”

Calling Christ a king has always been problematic, particularly for Jesus Himself. Jesus was a servant leader whose main mission was to bring truth and show people the way to love. He used all of His power, all of His knowledge, to lift others up out of their despair, poverty, fear, and isolation. Humility was His signature style. Hardly what comes to mind when one thinks of a king.

To this day, leaders who lead with humility find it uncovers truth. Take the example of Jungkiu Choi, who in the early 2000s served as the head of consumer banking at Standard Chartered in China.

As Dan Cable tells the story in Harvard Business Review, Choi would visit branches unannounced and offer breakfast to the employees before the doors opened. Then he would hold huddles and solicit ideas from employees. This

revealed small obstacles that Choi could help address with improved training and upgraded technology. Also, the visits yielded many new and innovative ideas, which Choi allowed managers to act on. This accessible, respectful, humble management style proved to be a winning approach. Within two years, customer satisfaction increased by 54 percent and employee attrition was reduced to the lowest among all the foreign banks in China.

My friends, if we believe in the words of Jesus -- and that's the biggest *if* we'll ever be confronted with -- then all power over our lives belongs to Him and His reign, which has no end. Nothing on earth can challenge the authority of Jesus. Is He YOUR King?

If we find ourselves bowing our heads to another King or tipping our hats to a different Lord, we might ask ourselves why. Do we let the King of lies, of fear, worries, and anger, of resentments and unforgiveness, anxieties and despair reign in our hearts? The testimony of Jesus is truth, and His is the only authority that lasts.

Today we proudly proclaim Christ as our King. Jesus establishes His kingdom one heart at a time. That means we freely dispel sinful darkness from our hearts, by being loving, kind, and compassionate so as to reflect those qualities of Jesus.

A few decades ago, there was a newspaper cartoon series called "The Wizard of Id." It featured a dwarf-sized king, who usually was at odds with his people and his royal staff. One of his ministers runs into the royal throne room and shouts, "The peasants are revolting!" The king says with great judgement, "You can say THAT again!"

Does Jesus find US "revolting? Do we listen to Him? We know that His message is true, and so we respond. And in so doing we help Him create a Kingdom -- one heart and one life at a time -- that will not be destroyed. A Kingdom of hope, and a Kingdom of justice and peace for all.

This week, when you find yourself saying the "Our Father," stop at the word "Kingdom." Say "Thy Kingdom come IN me; Thy Kingdom come THROUGH me, Thy will be done."

The more that we live out our faith, the greater the grandeur of Christ our King will be revealed to the world. Will YOU become a partner in the service of the Kingdom of God?

[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.

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

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!

