

Mass of Thanksgiving Day
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – November 23, 2017
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Once upon a time, there were only two kinds of correspondence that a child had to learn to write and send. During the summer, parents helped children pick out nice postcards to send home to family and friends, along with the child's inventive message – Having a great time! Wish you were here! And each year, after birthdays and Christmas, mom would make sure that each child sat down and wrote “Thank you” notes to those who had sent gifts. That usually involved an argument or two – But I said thank you when I got the gift – and a generic letter: Dear blank, Thank you so much for the blank. I will enjoy it. Of course, parents had to be careful and read each note – otherwise the letter might indeed go out to Dear “Blank.” These days, I suspect, thank you notes have been reduced to a text of Thx and a thumbs-up emoji. I'm not sure that Emily Post would approve, but a text – however brief – is certainly better than no acknowledgment at all.

Like the handwritten note, our expressions of gratitude to God for his many blessings seem to be similarly rare. Yes, once a year, we gather with family and friends and give thanks to God as we eat more in one sitting than many residents of developing countries have in two weeks' time. But on those remaining 364 days of the year, do we give gratitude much of a thought?

For Catholics, of course, I would hope that the answer is “yes.” We should be all about gratitude. After all our major act of worship – the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass – is built around the table of the Eucharist – and the word Eucharist is derived from the Greek word that means “thanksgiving.” Yes, as Catholics, we give God thanks each and every time we gather for Mass, each time we gather for the Sacrament of the Eucharist. For some, that means that we give thanks to God every day; for others, at least once a week; but for still others, well, maybe that means that we thank God on Christmas and Easter in addition to today.

In the preface that we will use to begin the Eucharistic prayer today, we say to God the Father, “Although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift, since our praises add nothing to your greatness but profit us for salvation.” In other words, God does not need our thanks. God is complete and perfect in and of himself. So why do we bother saying “thank you” to God if he doesn't need to hear it? Because, as the preface says, we have a basic human need to give thanks. We Christians need to be thankful, we need to develop grateful hearts so that we can recognize and appreciate our need for salvation. Without

gratitude, we become self-absorbed; with gratitude, we are concerned with the needs of others even more than our own needs. What does a world without gratitude look like? Well, read the papers, watch the news, scroll the internet. It is a world where everyone thinks that they are right and perfect and should be in charge. It is a world where everyone depends only *on* themselves and looks out only *for* themselves. It is a world not much different from that found in our gospel. Jesus took the time to cure ten lepers, the most devastating disease of the ancient world. Rejected by all – family and friends included – Jesus nonetheless looked with pity and compassion on them and gave them their very lives back. Yet only one returned to say, “Thank you,” only one could move beyond their own self-interest and offer humble gratitude to the great Messiah and King.

In many ways, we are – too often – like those other nine lepers. While we may acknowledge under our breath the role that others have played in our lives, we frequently live as those who are self-absorbed, as those who will constantly tell others how great we are and ignore the fact that the earth revolves around the sun, not around us. That is why a national day dedicated to giving thanks to God is so important. Our celebration of Thanksgiving is nowhere near enough to express what should be our tremendous gratitude to God, but at least it is a start. We may only say thank you once or twice or three times a year – but that is more often than many – and maybe it is enough to get us on the right track, to plant the seed of gratitude in our heart. So as we say thank you to God today, can we resolve to say “thank you” every day – at least until the leftovers run out. As we stretch the turkey to any number of creative meals, may we also stretch our hearts to remain grateful, not just for one meal or for one day but for a lifetime, for an eternal life time.