



“Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every one has plenty, not upon your misfortunes, of which everyone has some.”

Charles Dickens

STEWARDSHIP IN MOTION

Let Gratitude Be Our Attitude!

November arrives quickly for many of us; the relentless forward motion of the calendar thrusts us into the time of one of our fondest holidays – Thanksgiving. While there is much excitement, frivolity and fellowship bundled around this holiday, modern life has also saddled many of us with the stress of pressing expectations for not only Thanksgiving but beyond. How often do we hear the refrain, “I’m overwhelmed, I’ve got so much to do!” or witness similar expressions of frustrations from folks who are frantically seeking to buy or obtain this or that item, or the latest gift sensation for under this year’s Christmas tree?

As Christians committed to a life of stewardship, we can take a step back from these hectic pursuits as we approach these wonderful holidays to express our thanks for what we have already been given. Gratitude is not only a spiritually profound act; it shifts our focus from what our life lacks to the abundance that is already present. It allows us to pause enough to see and feel our many benefits and to grasp what scripture tells us – **“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down to us from the Father of Lights, from whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” (James 1:17)**

We certainly will benefit from contemplating these

evocative words from Gerard Manley Hopkins, the 19th century Jesuit poet ...

*“Glory be to God for dappled things --
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;
Landscape plotted |and pieced -- fold, fallow, and|
plough;
And all trades, their gear, tackle and trim.
All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled, (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; a dazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise Him.”*

As the saints are our best role models in virtually every aspect of life, let us turn to a 20th century saint, Saint Pier-Giorgio Frassati of Turin in Italy for an example of simple daily gratitude. This was a man of many contrasts. He was quite affluent, yet he lived in poverty, choosing to give away almost everything to the poor. Though he was popular, robust and gregarious, he especially liked to spend much of his time with those who were weak or suffering from physical limitations. Renowned as a practical joker and a sought after party guest, he was more content to pray solemnly in solitude, avoiding the adulation

that might otherwise have accrued to him. He was content and thankful; he chose to use his talents in service and alms giving rather than acquisition. He once said, *"Down then with all melancholy. I am joyful. Sorrow is not gloom. Gloom should be banished from the Christian soul."* His happiness was a special kind of gratitude. His thankful spirit freed him to then pursue aims that were not intended to feed his ego or satisfy his desires, but to assist others and fortify his soul.

Interestingly, recent evidence points to the physical benefits of a life of gratitude. Research conducted in Europe has shown a correlation between people who've expressed contentment and thankfulness and reduced blood pressure! This should not surprise us, as it only reminds us of that inviolate principle of stewardship – we cannot out give Our Lord. He will shower us with much more than we can give.

All of this is not to direct us to cultivate a disdain for the things of this world. Indeed, as the great Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis quipped, *"God likes matter – He invented it!"* It merely guides us to place material pursuits in proper context, and to always attend to our spiritual growth and continued faith formation.

Saint Louise de Marillac is another saint who can model both gratitude and attitude for us. After the death of her husband, Louise chose to dedicate her remaining life to Christian service. Grateful for what she had been given in life, she shared her blessings with the poor and down-trodden. It was about this time that Saint Vincent de Paul was recruiting wealthy women to work among the poor of Paris. Saint Louise began to work with him and soon after she founded the Sisters of Charity order; within 25 years over 40 convents were built to house these religious women.

"A faithful man will abound with blessings." (Prov 28:20)

Yet, Saint Louise was determined that her sisters not become too focused upon achieving spiritual perfection in their lives; she thought it would distract them from the mission and demoralize them. She wrote to a young colleague, *"It is a good thing, once a year, to apply ourselves to an examination, while being duly distrustful of ourselves and recognizing our weaknesses. But to put ourselves through a continual purgatory to analyze our souls... is useless, even dangerous. I am repeating to you what I was taught long ago. I beg you, my dear Sister, to help me by your*

prayers, as I will help you by mine, so that we may obtain from God the grace to walk simply and confidently along the path of his holy love without excessive

introspection."

Embedded in Saint Louise's admonition was the wisdom of living simply in God's love; among the dangers of chasing material gifts – and even at some level spiritual gifts – is that we can fall into an excessive reliance on ourselves and human willpower. Grace is a gift from God. We need be thankful for it at all times.

An almost perfected sense of gratitude can be found in the life of yet another Saint, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina. This priest suffered unimaginable physical ailments all of his life; afflictions of the limbs, the joints, the nervous system, and the eyes were just the most prominent of the illnesses. Additionally, he suffered from persecutions by the Church itself at times, and even had well-documented –and frightening – encounters with demons. Yet, he persevered in grateful joy. He was known, in his last years, to even require two fellow friars to carry him to the confessional, so that he might serve the legions of pilgrims who sought his ministries. Despite all this, his oft repeated instructions can profitably be our guide today – *"Pray, and don't worry!"*

DID YOU KNOW?

There are 193 dioceses in the United States. Among these are 32 archdioceses, 2 archeparchies and 14 eparchies. (An eparchy is an Eastern Rite Catholic term)

The largest of these is the Archdiocese of Los Angeles with over 4.1 million Catholics, while the smallest is the nearby Ruthenian Byzantine Eparchy of Van Nuys with 2,849 members!

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