

Trinity 12B 18th August 2024

Our near final Sunday about the Eucharist chapter of John's Gospel. Eucharist literally means in N.T. Greek "Thanksgiving" which reminds us that giving thanks to God sometimes can be a hard thing to do. The story is told of two old friends who bumped into one another on the street one day. One of them looked forlorn, almost on the verge of tears. His friend asked, "What has the world done to you, my old friend?" The sad fellow said, "Let me tell you. Three weeks ago, an uncle died and left me \$40,000." "That's a lot of money." "But, two weeks ago, a cousin I never even knew, died, and left me \$85,000" "Sounds like you've been blessed..." "You don't understand!" he interrupted. "Last week my great aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million." Now he was really confused. "Then, why do you look so glum?" "This week ... nothing!"

Gratitude is something that you only feel when a gift is truly appreciated. When you look at how much we have in the way of material blessings in Australia, is it any wonder that an attitude of gratitude is sorely missed? We watch pie - eating contests where people eat so many pies they often need to throw up. We are then, able to change channels and watch children dying by the minute in Somalia or some other poverty-stricken country. The sadness is that we can switch between these two contradictory scenes almost without notice.

We need the Old Testament and the heavenly manna it provides. But, we need equally to understand that manna without Jesus is never enough to fill our lives. Doing good without referencing or understanding it through our faith will always mean it will fall short no matter how great the good. When we fill our lives with both, we are then ready to proclaim to the world that there is more than enough of Jesus to go around, and then, through him, more than enough gratitude to be shared with the world. There is no clearer picture in scripture of what people must do to be fulfilled. For our lives will always be empty without the life - saving presence of Jesus.

All the mighty works that we do, will always in the last analysis be about us, and what we have done and not what God has done, unless we come into a right relationship with God through Jesus. Once in that right relationship, we will begin to see that we are filled with his presence and because of that, we will be able to see the world and all of the good and bad things in our world with new wisdom and clarity. How sad it is when we as wayward children put other "needs" ahead of this need for the Bread of Life made known in the person of Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ is the only real need that we have to live a life of eternal blessing. Yet, we pursue cars, homes, success and the applause of our peers and all manner of things, and in the process neglect the importance of returning thanks to the giver of all good gifts, for the only thing that really matters for eternity. It is sort of like going into the public library and seeing all the books. You can look at all that knowledge, but unless you take down a book and read it, you can only guess what is contained between its pages. You literally have to take that knowledge inside yourself in order to gain anything from it. It's the same with Jesus. You need to take him into your life in order to show the benefits outside of your life.

We have been blessed by God in ways too many to number, and yet we often feel just like the people in our Gospel for today. We, too, want Jesus to give us just one more proof, assurance or sign. We want one more demonstration of his power. It is almost as if they, and now us, are viewing Jesus' ministry as a biblical magic show. They wanted yet another demonstration of his power so "then they would believe." It seems to me that it was well past time for them, and it is definitely past time for us to believe in him and in the Father who had sent him. In fact we are told that from this time on the crowd drew away from Jesus. Have you drawn away from Jesus for all intents and purposes?

Possibly circumstances in your life have left you unable to see the many wondrous things God has done and continues to do in your life. Maybe you are drunk on your own success. Maybe the pain of life has overwhelmed you to the point where you don't see anymore how blessed you truly are. Maybe this is a time of sorrow for you because this is the first year without the person you loved. Maybe it is just that life has got away from you with the busyness that is so much a part of all of our lives. Maybe you in that category of people who have been so blessed that even those blessings don't look all that good anymore.

How, then, can we overcome our mind-set of apathy and move toward a true spirit of thanksgiving, in a culture that teaches us to enter into the rat race and compete for status with a world of unthankful people. I don't pretend to have all of the answers, but I do think we need to recognise God's blessing in all of their many manifestations and give thanks to God, even and most importantly when it seems impossible to do so. Far too often we see good things as done by us or other good people rather than the true source of all good.

I remember my father asking after my welfare and replying "I'm Good" to which he replied "no your are not God is Good."

And of all places that should be in the Church, how many times have I seen miserableness in the House of the Lord, rather than a thankfulness for all that God has done and continues to do in God's name for our and others benefit, to quote the Book of Common Prayer at Morning Prayer:

"ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father; We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things, which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord."

An anonymous email provides some following suggestions:

Make an effort today to recognise the blessings you've come to take for granted. Focus on what you have rather than on what you don't have, and see if it doesn't improve your attitude.

- Be thankful that you don't already have everything you want. If you did, what would there be to look forward to?
- Be thankful when you don't know something, this gives you the opportunity to learn.
- Be thankful for the difficult times. During those times you grow.
- Be thankful for your limitations, because they give you opportunities for improvement.
- Be thankful for each new challenge, because it will build strength and character.
- Be thankful for your mistakes. They will teach you valuable lessons.
- Be thankful when you're tired and weary, because it means you've made a difference.

It's easy to be thankful when things are good. And it easy to not see the good in anything either. But, a life of true fulfilment can come to those who are also thankful for the setbacks. As hard as it may be, find a way to be thankful for your troubles, and learn from them so they can become your blessings.

As we look around us at the land of plenty that we live in, it is my prayer that we will see through new eyes each day the ways that God has blessed us, and never take God or those blessings for granted. When we internalise those blessings we will be happy to spread our breadbasket full throughout the world. This year, may we each see God for who God really is and see ourselves as who we really are: People who have been blessed beyond our wildest dreams. We have been given the Bread of Life; we know this bread and have had our only lasting hunger satisfied. May we now be truly thankful to the God who deserves our thanks.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear, than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire, or deserve; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. AMEN

Fr Robert Newton