

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

It is a privilege to come into the very presence of God this day, drawing nigh unto Him in this Sanctuary, this place where He has promised to be, to return thanks and praise to Him for His gracious and plentiful provision.

We do so, that is, we are here this day, because that's what faith does. Our faith compels us to return thanks to God because we see His generous and loving Hand in all that we receive. We, like the Samaritan leper, turn our backs on the world, and return to give thanks to the Lord our God.

God is gracious. He is gracious in superabundant ways that far exceed our graciousness. Truth be told we're stingy givers. It's in our flesh. That means that we cannot out-give God. So, this day, as we return to give Him our thanks, He blesses us all the more abundantly. And for that we also return thanks.

So we see the life of faith to be a cycle of receiving and giving: we receive God's Gifts, which create faith, we receive God's Gifts, which sustain faith, and then we return thanks to Him, we give offerings to Him, and we go forth to use those Gifts in almsgiving and eleemosynary living; that is, living out our lives giving to others as God has given to us. And then God gives us more.

We don't do it to receive recognition. We do it because a living faith can do no other. We freely give because we have more freely received. We give because the Spirit of the Living God, the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Thrice-Holy Trinity, leads us to return thanks and praise to the God of our salvation, the God who provides, the God after whom Abraham named the place of sacrifice The Lord Will Provide.

We give because it brings each of us joy to help others see that all good Gifts are from the One True God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. So we thank God and bless others, returning thanks to God, and then - God blesses us anew, and the cycle begins again: a cycle of grace and love that envelops us in this life. Indeed, we have much for which to give thanks to God this day!

Consider Israel in their wilderness wanderings. They were much as you have been. But for the grace of God, they would have all perished. God humbled them, Moses writes, allowing them to hunger. Hungry, they weren't so puffed up and satisfied with themselves. They weren't so self-confident. Their empty stomachs drove them to the realization that they had no choice but to confess their shortcomings and unworthiness.

Only then did God give them the Manna, that they know that man does not live by bread alone; but man lives by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And that Truth our Lord Himself employed to defend against the devil in His temptation in the wilderness.

So it wasn't about bread. It was about the Word of God. It is good to give thanks to God for your daily bread. It is God-pleasing. Moses continues: "When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God..." But it's never really about bread. Bread is the outward symbol. It is the concrete evidence of a greater Gift that isn't seen.

It's always about the Word of God. It is always about faith seeing the Gifts as coming from God's hand. It is about confessing your unworthiness to receive His Gifts, and sincerely believing that you do not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

That's what the Apostle writes to Bishop Timothy – he exhorts that supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made – for all men, that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth. And the Truth is: "...there is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all." That Word, the Gospel Word, is the Word that works forgiveness and life.

It is that knowledge, the knowledge of Christ, believing that He died to save you, that is the greatest of God's Gifts. It is for that, and for our daily bread, that we observe this day as one of thanksgiving, although truth be told every day is a day of thanksgiving for the Christian.

But we do not give thanks as the world gives thanks. We are not hedonistic, we do not build bigger barns and say "eat, drink and be merry" in the way that the world does. But we do eat. We eat what God provides. For that we are thankful. We eat the Body of Christ. And for that we give thanks, which is what the word Eucharist means – thanksgiving.

For our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night in which He was betrayed, took bread. And when He had given thanks, seeing scourge and cross ahead, seeing death and the tomb ahead, He gave thanks. And with that Thanksgiving He then instituted the Holy Meal with which you are fed this day.

So yes, we eat. And yes, we drink. We drink the Blood shed for us, the Blood of Christ shed for the remission of our sins. For that we offer our endless thanks and praise. And yes, forgiven, restored to God through the forgiveness of our sins, we eat, drink - and we are merry, for true joy is found only in the Saving Gifts of God.

But unlike the world, we do not take credit for the Gifts. We do not claim to have earned or merited them. We do count them as ours, we see them as God's. And unlike the world, we do not count ourselves worthy of such miraculous Gifts.

Unlike the world, we do not think we are entitled to what God provides. Unlike the world, we do not count ourselves as victims when others seem to have more. That is the opposite of thankfulness. Unlike the nine lepers, we don't grab what God gives and go. Faith can't do that.

We return to give thanks, because that's what faith does. And that thanksgiving, true thanksgiving, the thanks that saving faith compels us to return to God, that thanksgiving, our thanksgiving, gives all glory to God.

That is what the Lord said to the one leper who returned: "...were not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" Give God the glory. Take no glory for yourself. That is true thanksgiving. The Psalmist writes of true thanksgiving: "We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near."

To say that the Name of God is near is to say that God Himself is near. It is for that nearness, the nearness of Christ our Savior to us, the nearness of His Holy Name to our hearts and souls, that we thank and glorify God.

For the God that gave Moses to speak to Israel has given His Saving Word to you. The God that spoke through His Apostle is the One Mediator, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for you. That One Lord has healed you. He has bespoken you righteous. He has showered you with His Gifts. And to you, you who believe in Him on this Thanksgiving Day, to you He says, “Your faith has made you well.” Thanks be to God!

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