

FROM THE PASTOR'S PRINTER

THANKSGIVING AND GIVING WITH THANKS

Probably most of us like celebrating Thanksgiving, and some of us love celebrating it. While we might find certain things we don't enjoy about it – the amount of work, certain people who will be with us, – I think if we really hated it, we wouldn't do it. (As a friend of mine says, "Yes, my family is crazy, and they can drive me nuts, but their MY family and in the end, I love them.")

No matter where we stand on the like-o-meter of Thanksgiving, it seems to me that there is a basic need within us to give thanks. I base that on the fact that people who are grateful seem to be happier in life than those who aren't grateful. You could argue that grateful people are happier because they have stuff to be grateful for. Ungrateful people don't. "Nay, nay," I say. (I don't usually say "nay, nay", but it rhymes better than "wrong!") In my experience of dealing with people of all sorts, I have found that gratitude does not have a direct correlation to one's fortune or lot in life. In fact, I have found that often it is from the poor, the sick, and those who have the luck of Job, that a sense of gratitude flows more fully than from the healthiest and wealthiest of us, and those who have life by the tail. I know four persons' whose sense of gratitude has shaped my own sense of gratitude, and I would never want to live with the crosses they bear. They are not people who are escapists from their situation; they recognize that life has not dealt them a fair hand, and that God has often not answered their prayers in the way they wished.

What is their secret to the gratitude that leads them to happiness? I think there are several. First, I think they are people who realize that all of life is a gift; to exist is a gift, to have anything they have is a gift. Even though we work to get whatever, the fact that it is even accessible is a gift. Secondly (and this may sound crazy given what I just wrote), they realize life is not fair. Life does not follow the rules we expect it to. Realizing this, they have the ability to roll with the punches. Thirdly, they are people who choose to see the world from the perspective of what is good in life and not from what is wrong with life. This is not a

seeing through rose-colored glasses, because at the same time, they recognize that they have (often major) problems, but they appreciate the good that is there and work to change what is bad. Fourthly, they see the world as bigger than themselves. They are people who can appreciate the pain others feel, and they find joy in reaching out to them. They are not focused on their own problems. And fifthly, I find that they are people who believe God is good and living, in spite of the fact that life is not going their way. They are what the Old Testament refers to as the *anawim*, the poor who put their trust in God. And you know what? So often they find God provides what they need; maybe not what they want, but what they need.

All of this does not mean that they do not struggle with the trials of life, but that they look beyond themselves for the strength to see clearly.

Such a life of gratitude is not limited to the down and out. I know many people who have a blessed life financially, health wise, and good fortune by this world's standards who live with the same spirit, and in their gratitude to God, they are always reaching out to bring others a taste of God's goodness. They recognize that God intends them to be the answer to someone else's prayer and that what they possess is not meant to stop with them, but to flow through them to others.

Regardless of our income, our situation in life, or our health, each of us has the ability to be grateful, if only we open our eyes to see the good in our life and the presence of God among us.

A blessed Thanksgiving and a blessed life of giving in thanks! – Fr. Jeff

**Give thanks to the Lord,
for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.**