

National Day of Thanksgiving

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

You have heard the story of Jesus and the Ten Lepers countless times. It comes up every year at Thanksgiving, and depending on the lectionary used, it's read a second time. You might even know some of it by heart. Consequently, you might already know some of the things I'm going to say about it. Jesus and His disciples were traveling through Samaria. As they came near a village, they were approached by ten men with leprosy. They cried out to Jesus, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." They didn't call out with the usual cry to stay away since they were unclean. However, having heard of Jesus, they knew He could make them clean. "Go and show yourselves to the priests," Jesus replied. On the way, all ten are made clean and would be declared as such by the priests, allowing them to return to their regular routines and lives. However, one of the ten, realizing that he was clean, returned to Jesus to thank Him; the priests could wait—Jesus had done to this man what he believed Jesus could. (cf. Luke 17:11-19)

You have also heard St. Paul's exhortation to St. Timothy, though not as often. The second reading for a national day of thanksgiving can be taken from 1 Timothy 2, as was done today, or from Philippians 4. Still, the words to St. Timothy are also quite familiar to you, and you also might know what I would say about this text. There, St. Paul exhorted the young pastor and his flock to make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks for all men, for kings and all who are in authority. Kings and those in authority would not be kings or have authority apart from God granting it to them. God gives government so that all people can live a quiet and peaceable life—so that believers can do so in godliness and reverence to Him. So you ought to pray to God for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris and Donald Trump and JD Vance and Jared Polis and Dianne Primavera and the whole host of those to whom God has granted authority to govern this great land; and thank God for them and for this government, that by it you are able to live a quiet and peaceable life. For another, with regard to all men, including kings and those in authority, you ought to give thanks because God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-14)

And you have also heard from Moses and his account of Israel as they were about to enter Canaan after their long exodus from Egypt. "Remember," God told his chosen people; "[R]emember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness..." Through those 40 years, their clothes and shoes did not wear out, and God provided them just enough manna and quail to survive one day to the next. This He did to teach them that "man does not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." And why? Because He was about to bring them into a good land flowing with brooks and springs of water, land filled with wheat and barley and vines and figs and pomegranates and olive trees and honey. God's chosen people were about to receive much more than they could have ever imagined after 40 years of want and destitution. And God says, "And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you." (cf. Deuteronomy 8:1-10)

Through all of those times, and especially on this day, one thought permeates those three readings. Hear Jesus' words on the matter: "Give us this day our daily bread." (Matthew 6:11) God gives faith to trust in Him for all things, and so to you as to the leper He says, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has saved you." God gives rulers so that you may live your life in this world in godliness and reverence of Him, and for this God is to be thanked and praised, served and obeyed. God provides lean times to teach you to trust in Him for all things, gives you all things to support your body and life, and, at times, gives you an abundance with which you can serve your neighbors, so when you eat of the bounty that God has given you, we bless and thank Him for the good which He has given you. Therefore, you are given the words "Give us this day our daily bread" to pray.

The Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer teaches what? For one thing, you are taught that

Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.

Daily bread includes those things you heard about in today's lessons, and have heard about countless times. From Luke you hear of the lepers being given health and their livelihoods back as their daily bread. From 1 Timothy you hear of the gift of good government and neighbors being part of daily bread. From Deuteronomy you hear of food, drink, clothing, shoes, land, animals, minerals, and ores all being part of daily bread.

So, when you pray the Fourth Petition, you are praying for those things which God already gives you and all men out of His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in you. As Jesus said, "[The Father] his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:45) This is God's nature as Creator—He did not simply create the cosmos and then step back to watch what would happen; God is an involved Creator who loves and cherishes what He has created so that He continues to provide for it. As one to whom is proclaimed, "Arise, go your way; your faith has saved you," as indeed it should be for all creation, it is become your duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him for all of His First Article gifts—God commands it; He wishes to hear your thanks for all the good He has given to you.

Nine lepers ran to show themselves to the priests, never to see Jesus again or thank Him, most likely returning to the livelihoods without a second thought of the want and need they had been in before they ran to Jesus pleading for healing and cleansing. In some places, kings and those in authority persecute Christians or subtly rule against them or in one way or another rule unfavorably according to one person or group of people or another; this can even happen in a place of religious liberty and tolerance. Fallen human nature makes so that in those times, no matter how slight the ruling against the Christian, thanks is not rendered to God but scorn and hatred, perhaps even a desire that the king or those in authority would somehow find an early or untimely exit from their position of authority. Following the book of Deuteronomy is the book of Joshua, in which is recounted the conquest of Canaan as the Israelites take possession of the land and its bounty as God had promised them; then comes the book of Judges which shows that the result of sinful man living with God-given bounty, goodness, and peace is apostasy, not thankfulness.

Sinful man's track record isn't good when it comes to rendering to God the thanks He deserves and commands. As you search your own past, doubtless there are times and events for which you should have and could have thanked God, but didn't. Even worse, there are times when you took the credit for the blessings that God lavished upon you. It should come as no surprise that you and your neighbors are unable and, dare I say it, unwilling to thank and praise, serve and obey God for His lavish goodness and First Article gifts; you have a hard time with all of God's decrees and commandments, why would this one be any different?

Listener beware! That was said not as an excuse. God commands in His Word that you thank and praise Him; you heard as much from the reading from Deuteronomy—"And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you"—and 1 Timothy—"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people..." If that's not enough for you, then hear the Word of the Lord, in which you have life:

- Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! (1 Chronicles 16:34)
- Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. (Psalm 30:4)
- It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night... (Psalm 92:1-2)

- Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Repent of your unthankfulness and rejoice in the mercy of your God. He does not remove His abundance from you, nor remove from you from His providence. Like the nine lepers who did not return to thank Jesus, yet were still healed and restored, He still gives you all that you need to support this body and life, whether or not you acknowledge and thank Him. To you, to whom He is giving faith to believe and trust in Him, to receive from Him goodness for the life to come, He again says, “Arise, go your way. Your faith has saved you.”

And that’s why He gives the Fourth Petition (among them all) to pray. “Give us this day our daily bread.” What does this mean?

God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

In a sense, this Fourth Petition serves as a little confession. For when you pray it, you acknowledge before God that we do not always realize that God is the giver of the daily bread that you receive and that you do not always receive it with thanksgiving. Therefore, like beggars asking for a crumb of bread, like lepers seeking mercy, you ask that God would grant that you realize that He is the giver of daily bread and that you receive it from His hand like the one leper who returned to thank Jesus—you ask to be forgiven for those times when you don’t. And in His grace and mercy, God does just that—more daily bread from the giver of all good.

He points to the cross, upon which He has given for all the world the Bread of Life. There, sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins, is the Word that went from the mouth of the LORD by which man lives. Yes, God Himself, in the flesh of His Son, took your unthankfulness from you, and in your place was perfectly thankful for every blessing, temporal and spiritual, that God lavishes upon man—for bread and fish (cf. John 6:11), for right faith and knowledge (cf. Luke 10:21-22), for hearing his prayer (cf. John 11:41), and even for the giving of His own body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins—He was perfectly thankful for every First Article gift and the every gift of righteousness.

And if God in Christ has taken your sin, every bit of it, not only unthankfulness, then He has left none of it for you. Your sin is no longer yours, but His. And, taking it into His flesh, He died the death due for sin in your place, giving you the benefits of His perfect life and death. Jesus Christ is your ransom—“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time”—the greatest gift for which to give thanks.

For Jesus’ sake, your God says to you, “Arise, go your way. Your faith has saved you. You are forgiven for all of your sins.” God gives you the Fourth Petition to pray—“Give us this day our daily bread.” And He answers your prayers with Jesus Christ. By His answer, through Jesus Christ, you are able say with the Psalmists,

- [So] that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever! (Psalm 30:12)
- I will thank you in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will praise you. (Psalm 35:18)
- I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. (Psalm 69:30)
- But we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise. (Psalm 79:13)

In the name of Jesus. Amen.