

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

"Give us this day our daily bread," Jesus taught you to pray. What is meant by daily bread? Luther instructed: "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."

Luther left a list of things for which to be thankful, finishing them off with the phrase, "And the like." After all, as you learned from the Small Catechism, "Give us this day our daily bread," means, "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."

So, take a closer look at that list. Are you thankful for things like food and drink? I'm guess that for most of you, even with these increased prices, food is very much readily available, and you never think about the methods by which that food is available.

For the young in attendance, you receive your bread and water as a little child, because you are a child. Parents prepare meals and set them before you, or they let you know where the food is so that you can prepare something simple for yourself. Maybe you thank your parents for the food that they have prepared and provided for you, though I suspect thankfulness is not near your lips as you begin to eat.

For the rest of you, food and drink are matters of income and expenses. You work (or have worked once upon a time) in order to put food on the table for you and your family, if you have one. You trudge through your daily routine, working for the paycheck so that you can buy your groceries. Even more than your children, I suspect that thankfulness is the least of your concerns as you purchase, prepare, and eat your food and drink.

The same goes for your clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, and goods. All of these are good and perfect gifts given to you by God. Yes, you have to work for them, but God provides the means for you to acquire these goods. He gives you the skills you need to earn a just wage or the charity of others to supply what might be lacking, all in order that the supports and needs of your body are met.

Children approach these things without a second thought, usually. You might say that they take them for granted, and that may be so, but I would suggest that it is all done innocently enough. They have no concern for how goods are procured unless and until those necessary goods are missing and they have developed a greater sense of how stuff comes from the store to the house.

Adults, on the other hand, knowing how to acquire these First Article gifts, approach them more cynically. As easily as these good can be acquired, so easily can they also be lost, wasted, broken, or end up in any number of states that make them unusable, and this not always through the direct fault of the person. Easy come, easy go—knowing this, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to be thankful for these gifts of God.

That does not negate the fact, for either children or adults, that these things are given through the grace, mercy, and compassion of God.

The same goes for all of the other items on that list. A devout spouse, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good

reputation, good friends, and faithful neighbors are all gifts from God. And even when you don't have any of them, they are still God's gifts to you. For instance, even in times when the politics in this country have not been as polarizing as they are currently, I'm sure there have been times when you have not been pleased with the outcome of one election or another. You may even have just cause to complain about the consequences of an election. In such times, it can be difficult to consider the government a gift of God for which to be thankful. Nevertheless, God's Word bids you to pray for your rulers (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-2) and acknowledge that they are from God (cf. Romans 13:1-4), and you are to be thankful to God for them.

For a little perspective, consider this: would you really want to live in any other country if an election doesn't go your way? Certainly, every election season you hear people proclaim that if so-and-so is elected, they're moving to Canada, but who among them actually does? It kind of becomes an acknowledgment that, no matter how bad things may get here, or perceived to be here, it is better than anything else out there (even Canada). And if that is the case, and you agree with it, in addition to the command to thank God for good rulers and good government, isn't this reason enough to thank God for good rulers and good government?

How about good weather? I have once lived in a place where the people constantly complained about the weather. When it was warm, they complained that it was warm. When it was cool, they complained that it was cool. When it was raining, they complained about the rain. When it was dry, they complained that it was dry. When it was windy, they complained about the wind. When it was still, they complained about the stillness. Each of these things, in their own right, make for good weather, sent by God. Even those spells which are exceptionally wet or snowy or dry or warm or cold are sent by God. So, are you thankful for any or all of this?

The answer to all of these questions is that you are not. Rarely, if ever, are you thankful for anything that is on this list, and those rare times when you are thankful are never enough to "make up for" those times when you are not. So, even when there are occasions when you thank God for His provision, you are, more often than not, ungrateful. It is part and parcel of your being a sinner; your Old Man refuses to thank God, much less acknowledge Him, for all of His benefits to you.

That's why God sent another gift, greater than all those listed here or in the explanation to the First Article of the Creed. These are all good gifts, given to support the body. But your thanklessness indicates a greater need, something for more than just the body, but also the soul. "[For] when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5) Listen to those words again, and marvel at them: "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman..." God, who is divine, sent His Son—the second person of the Trinity—into the flesh, to be born under the weight of His own law, in order that you would receive the adoption as sons.

This is no ordinary feat. This is the Creator becoming one with His creation. This is the Creator taking on the very same flesh, bone, and blood as the apex of His creation. In all of the mythologies the world over, every false religion that the Deceiver has created, not once does a god become a man. Some may manifest themselves as a man, but never is a god conceived in the womb of a woman—and in Jesus' case, a virgin—born, and grow up into a man just like the rest of humanity—to be "of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting," as you confess in the Athanasian Creed.

What this means is that God knows what it feels like. What is "it?" Everything. God knows exactly what you are going through, for He has gone through it Himself. God knows what it's like to be you. He knows what it's like to be loved, to love, to be hated and disliked, to dislike, to enjoy something, not to enjoy something, to be hurt, to heal, to be bruised, beaten, cut, scraped, and even sick. He's been there, and He's been there for you.

Case in point are the ten lepers in today's Gospel. If Jesus were not a man like you, but simply a god manifesting Himself in the flesh, He would likely have just passed them by without a second thought. If He had a thought at all to show them mercy, He would likely have waved His hands over them, then gone on His way.

But that's not Jesus. Jesus is a God unlike any other, and He is a man unlike any other. Being fully God and fully man, only Jesus could have compassion on these ten the way He did. Jesus, knowing exactly what they were going through, stopped and spoke to the ten, telling them to show themselves to the priest. Off they went, and as they went, they were healed. One returned to thank God. Who wouldn't? Well, the other nine didn't, but this one Samaritan realized that God was standing before him in the flesh, a God who could sympathize with him. And this sympathetic God healed him. The priests could wait, Jesus was there right now, but wouldn't be for long, as He was on His way to the cross.

Here's the real kicker, though. Inasmuch as God in Christ was able to sympathize with the lepers, He is also able to sympathize with you. He knows about your routine and your thanklessness; He's seen it first-hand, felt it first-hand. No, I'm not saying He was ever ungrateful, but being fully man, He has seen why you are first-hand, and as the other nine lepers could possibly attest, felt the effects of ingratitude first-hand as a man. He knows; God knows—and He is able to sympathize with you. Therefore, He gives you the greatest gift: Himself.

Jesus isn't flesh and blood simply to sympathize with you, but to give of that flesh and blood for your redemption. So, on a very good Friday, that flesh and blood of God carried a cross part of the way to Golgotha, even as He bore your sins to that place. There, He was nailed to it, shedding His blood, and giving His life over to death as the sacrifice for your sin. He took your ingratitude into His flesh and destroyed it, even though you now suffer with it. Yes, Jesus knows, but He loves you, has compassion on you, and forgives you for it.

What greater gift is there to be thankful for? Dear hearers, you now express that thankfulness as you hasten to His command and invitation at the table here, even today. For He comes to you in compassion, with His flesh and blood, hidden in the simple means of bread and wine, for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. These, you take into your mouths at Jesus' command and invitation, and in faith receive the very things which He gives Himself to you. And in faith, you receive this good meal with thanksgiving, as your New Man rejoices in that which you have received.

So, on this national day of thanksgiving, remembering the good gifts that God has given you on this shore, remember in thanksgiving also the good things that He has given you to bring you to that distant, bright shore. For your God has given you His Son, having become one with you—a God able to sympathize with you unlike any other god—and sacrificed Himself on the cross for you, giving you life, salvation, and the forgiveness of all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.