



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
by The Reverend Andrew Van Culin, *Rector***

**The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
23 August, 2026**

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

While it's customary to preach on the gospel lesson, I'm giving you a little reprieve today in part because the lesson we've just heard from Matthew is really a two part lesson. We have the introduction of the call of Peter or the naming of Peter as the rock upon which the church will be founded. And then we get the rest of the story (as Paul Harvey reminds us) next week.

Today I want to take us back to the Psalm, particularly the opening verse of the Psalm. For when I read it earlier this week, it took me back a few years. It reads, "I will give thanks to you, oh Lord, with my whole heart. Before the gods, I will sing your praise. I will give thanks to you, oh Lord." Those opening words took me all the way back to seminary and not specifically to seminary, but to Bethany Convent, a little convent just outside of Boston, Massachusetts and Cambridge where I was, just in a little town of Bethany with seven holy sisters of St. Anne. I would visit there. I would worship with them every Wednesday morning at 7:00 am. And fortunately for the few of us that made our trek out there, after the Eucharist, they would have us to breakfast.

It was a holy, wonderful place to be. It still exists, Bethany Convent. It's now primarily a retreat house, but if you're ever in Boston, if you're ever looking for a quiet place to be, I highly recommend it. But breakfast on Wednesday morning was very simple. Most things at the convent were simple. A soft boiled egg or two and a piece of toast, butter and jam. Every Wednesday at about 7:30 in the morning.

And grace was just as simple. For these and all thy many mercies, we give you thanks, oh Lord. Every Wednesday morning at about 7:35, those words would be spoken to open our time of fellowship with one another. For these and all thy many mercies, we give you thanks, oh Lord. Now, if you've ever dined with me, particularly in our household, you'll know that that is the Van Culin grace. I commend it. But here's why. Not just because it's simple and easy to remember.



I commend it because it's a profound act of discipline. And not discipline in the sense of discipline thou shalt, but discipline in the way of practice that shapes our lives for good. We're so accustomed to rigorous Christianity and rigorous exercise and daily routines that make us better. And here is a simple act of daily grace that has the capacity to transform us, to shape us for good. To begin those words, for these and all thy many mercies we give you thanks, oh Lord. These words are a profound theological statement to center your life each day, once or twice or three times a day if you're so disciplined to say grace at every meal. To reorient and to recenter your life on the reality of God's presence for you.

To realize that all of the good of creation, not just the magnificence of the stars, but the simple meal before you, the people gathered at your table, the chair upon which you sit, the table around which you gather, the house or the restaurant or the place under which you are seated. All of these and many more, to recognize that all of these gifts do not come simply from the work of human hands. In fact, all of the good of creation begins with the outpouring of God's generosity and love for you and for the world. To recognize that there is a source of life and of goodness beyond you, beyond your neighbor, beyond this nation is a profound theological statement to make.

And it is one that has the capacity to reorient our lives, to take us out of the centrality of myself and to look up and to see and to remember that my life is not simply orbiting around me or my children or my spouse, but upon and around the central access of all of creation. The one from whom all good and all life has streamed. You see, to recognize, to live with gratitude is to recognize that there is a source of goodness in life beyond us and to reorient our lives to the grace and mercy and love of God. But it doesn't stop there.

It doesn't take long, especially if you're having a quiet meal and you begin with those words. It doesn't take long to move from gratitude for the egg in front of you to the person across from you or the people of your life. It doesn't take long for the mind and the heart to realize that you are, I am grateful for the myriads of gifts that people give to me each day. From companionship and friendship, from mercy and generosity, from the time spent, the hospitality given, the favors offered. It doesn't take long when we're in a place of gratitude to recognize that the people of our life are equally gifts to us. And so, it has the capacity to reshape the character of our relationship from away from transactional responsibility that I have an obligation to you and you have an obligation to me to one of generosity and gratitude.

To recognize that those things that are given are gifts, not mere obligations. It doesn't take much. It takes a simple commitment to say a few words at every meal. And I contend you'd be surprised by the



impact those words have upon your life. For me, those words are for these and all thy many mercies. We give you thanks, oh Lord. The Psalmist begins with equally beautiful words. I will give thanks to you, oh Lord, with my whole heart. Before the gods, I will sing your praise. The words themselves don't matter. The gratitude does. Amen.