

# A Gratefulness Primer



*The Pilgrimage* October 2021

# Grateful Living

“Give thanks to the LORD, who is good,  
whose mercy endures forever!” [Psalm 107:1]



“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts  
... and be thankful.

Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the  
name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father  
through him.” [Colossians 3:15,17]



“But . . . Professor Barth, how do you  
*know* that you are Christian?”

“I know this because I’m grateful.”

[Question posed to theologian Karl Barth and his concise answer]



“... come to comfortable rest in the certainty that those who  
participate in this life with an attitude of Thanksgiving  
will receive its full promise.”

[From the Prologue of the Rule of Saint Benedict as rendered by John McQuiston]

# Some Writings To Peruse

“For if you go poking about the world, intent on keeping the candle of consciousness blazing, you must be ready to give thanks at all times. Discrimination is not allowed. The flame cannot gutter and fail when a cold wind whistles throughout the house.

Thanksgiving, thanksgiving, thanksgiving. All must be thanksgiving.”

— From *And the Trees Clap Their Hands* by Virginia Stem Owens

“It is a mark of religious insensitiveness that instead of grateful recognition of unworthiness to receive the gifts of God, there is so often acceptance without gratitude or contrition but with complaint when things go wrong. Though there is no single index by which to discern a Christian, there is an index by which one may test his own experience. Confronted by pain and annoyance does one say, ‘Why does this have to happen to me?’ Or encompassed by God’s bounties does one say, ‘Who am I that I should be thus blest?’ The former reaction is the mark of self-pity and self-righteousness, the latter of Christian humility.”

—From *Prayer and Common Life* by Georgia Harkness

“All sin is punishment for the primal sin of not knowing God. That is to say all sin is a punishment for ingratitude. For as St. Paul says (Romans 1:21) the Gentiles, who ‘knew’ God did not know Him because they were not grateful for the knowledge of Him. They did not know Him because their knowledge of Him did not gladden them with His love. For if we do not love Him we show that we do not know Him. He is love. *Deus caritas est.*”

Our knowledge of God is perfected by gratitude: we are thankful and rejoice in the experience of the truth that He is love.”

—From *Thoughts in Solitude* by Thomas Merton

“A true Christian is a man who never for a moment forgets what God has done for him in Christ and whose whole comportment and whose activity have their root in the sentiment of gratitude.”

John Baille

“Pride slays thanksgiving, but a humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grows. A proud man is seldom a grateful man for he never thinks he gets as much as he gives.”

Henry Ward Beecher

“There is no neutrality between gratitude and ingratitude. Those who are not grateful soon begin to complain of everything. Those who do not love, hate. In the spiritual life there is no such thing as an indifference to love or hate. That is why tepidity (which seems to be indifferent) is so detestable. It is hate disguised as love.

Tepidity, in which the souls is neither ‘hot nor cold’—neither frankly loves nor frankly hates—is a state in which one rejects God and rejects the will of God while maintaining an exterior pretense of loving Him in order to keep out of trouble and save one’s supposed self-respect. It is the condition that is soon arrived at by those who are habitually ungrateful for the graces of God. A man who truly responds to the goodness of God, and acknowledges all that he has received, cannot possibly be a half-hearted Christian. True gratitude and hypocrisy cannot exist together. They are totally incompatible. Gratitude of itself makes us sincere—or if it does not, then it is not true gratitude.”

—From *Thoughts in Solitude* by Thomas Merton

“In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich. It is very easy to overestimate the importance of our own achievements in comparison with what we owe others.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“The best way to show gratitude to God is to accept everything, even my problems, with joy.”

Mother Theresa

“Expect nothing. Live frugally on surprise.”

Alice Walker

# Cultivating An Attitude Of Thanksgiving

## Being Attentive to the Gifts God Gives

Do this often, for in the course of a normal day they shower down around us and are as often overlooked as the drops of rain which nourish the earth and sustain it's many forms of life. A Benedictine pattern might include 7 times for worship and prayer where we return to glorify God through thanksgiving and praise (post Vatican II many now observe a 5 fold pattern). Though few of us have time and opportunity for that worship schedule - we *can* adopt a pattern of frequent mindfulness of God born in gratitude. Below I suggest a seven fold pattern which can be completed in 14 minutes a day - a manageable commitment even for us.

### **A. Start Your Day In Gratitude (2 minutes)**

"At the beginning of each day after we have opened our eyes to receive the light of that day; As we listen to the voices and sounds around us; We must resolve to treat each hour as the rarest of gifts and be grateful for the consciousness that allows us to experience it, recalling in thanks that our awareness is a present from we know not where or how or why." [McQuiston p.19]

### **B. Give Thanks For Family & Friends (2 min. on way to work)**

There is no more sacred relationship than that between loved ones. Our families are the place where we learn to love God. Though sometimes this blessing can be also a source of pain - those we love and those who love us are among God's greatest treasures.

### **C. Give thanks For Work (2 minutes)**

Stop mid morning (or anytime you feel stressed) and:

- i) Remember that everything doesn't depend on you. Give thanks that *God* is running this world.
- ii) Give thanks for your calling to partner with God in living mercifully and establishing the Kingdom on earth "as it is in heaven."

### **D. Give Thanks For Faith And The Church (2 min. at Lunch)**

What faith we know grows out of the faith of all of the saints who down through the ages have lived for the love of God. The witness of their living and of their interactions with God have been preserved to our benefit. The Bible, the memory of the holy catholic church, the writings of great people of faith, and the words and witness of faith filled people in our lives now join together to nurture our faith. Thank God for them.

Sometimes we may feel less than grateful for the institution of the church which is slow to change, has at times been arrogant and condescending, and always bears the Good News of the faith "in earthen vessels[2 Cor. 4:7]." For all of it's very real faults, however, the church is "the body of Christ," and is indivisible from the Gospel it proclaims. Knowing that after his crucifixion Peter would deny him (x3) and return to fishing rather than risk proclaiming the truth, Jesus nevertheless said, "On this rock [petra = Peter] I will found the church.[Matt. 16:18-ff]" While we strive to make the holy catholic church more Christlike we also acknowledge that in it God has entrusted the Gospel.

### **E. Give Thanks For Possessions (2 min. mid afternoon)**

What we have is given by God. Be sure to acknowledge this daily by giving God thanks. Deuteronomy 8:11-ff (NRSV) says this well:

"Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God . . . When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. **Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth."** But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today."

## F. Give Thanks For The Beauty of the Moment

(2 min. whenever - sometime each day)

. . . the beauty of sunrise/set; the smell of freshly turned earth; the crunch of gravel underfoot; the mysterious power of music to charm, heal, and speak from the heart of God; the reveries brought on by sudden remembrance; words of affection from a loved one. God is waiting to meet you in many places each day. Stop to give thanks for what is good and beautiful in our world at least once a day.

**G. Give Thanks For Rest** (2 min. at the close of each day)

You may recite Psalm 127:1-2

“Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.

It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for God gives sleep to his beloved.”

OR perhaps Psalm 4:8

“I will both lie down and sleep in peace;  
for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.”

God has given the gift of sleep and rest. The ancient prayer says, “In our sleep give us that deeper communion of our souls with you who restores unto health.” We are not made to rise up early and go late to our rest eating the bread of anxious toil, rather, we are made to return to God in sleep where - in communion with the Holy - we are restored.

