

SERRA CLUB THANKSGIVING MASS
NOVEMBER 15, 2013

We gather in a time of year when we are accustomed to giving thanks to God for all the blessings that we have received. Of course, we should always be giving thanks to God, but I think there is something special about this season that lends itself to gratitude. Perhaps as the weather becomes colder our ancestral instincts naturally turn us toward hearth and home. Or perhaps as the harvest comes in, we are more reminded of the blessing of food and how it both nourishes us and brings us together around the table as families and as a community. Whatever it is, we should take advantage of the fact that our hearts are more naturally disposed to gratefulness in this time. And what more beautiful way than to come together to celebrate the great “Thanksgiving Meal” that is the Eucharist. And as we gather as a Serra Club, devoted to the promotion of vocations, we are especially thankful for the priests, the deacons, and the religious, living and deceased, who have faithfully served and who continue to serve the Diocese of Davenport.

The readings that we have just heard remind us strongly of this theme of thanksgiving. Of course, this is by design -- I knew I was preaching tonight and I picked out the readings.

And so, in the first reading, Saint Paul (writing to the Church in Ephesus) praises God for having “blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the

heavens.” Christ Himself is, in other words, the *greatest blessing*, the greatest gift humanity has ever received. In *Him* – in His incarnation, His passion, death and resurrection – we have indeed received “every spiritual blessing.” It follows that we should be thankful for this gift. If there is *anything* in life or in the world we should be thankful for, this is it: the gift of Jesus Christ. And how fitting that Jesus should continually offer this gift of Himself to us in the Eucharist, a word which, as we know, itself means “thanksgiving.”

But in this letter to the Ephesians there is more than simply a prayer of thanksgiving. After Paul has “blessed” God for blessing us in Christ, he reminds us that God “*chose us* in him,” that “in love he destined us for adoption.” And so, there is not only a theme of thanksgiving to God here, but also a theme of vocation.

God has given us the gift of His Son, and in Him redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. And this was no merely *external* gift. Rather, it was a gift that radically and forever changed us from within. And so, while God is certainly pleased that we give Him thanks and praise, this thanks must be more than merely *external*. True thanksgiving comes not just from the lips, but from the heart. It comes when we recognize and fully embrace that fact that God has chosen us in Christ Jesus, that He has made us His sons and daughters through the spirit of adoption, that He made us for Himself, and from that place of gratitude we are then willing to lay down our lives in service to God, as priests, deacons, religious, lay,

married, single. Such a profound gift as our redemption deserves profound thanks, namely, the thanks of *service* that issues from a grateful heart.

The Gospel passage, of course, also speaks of profound thanksgiving. In fact, it is probably the most quintessential “thanksgiving” passage in the New Testament, and one that we heard in the daily readings just this past Wednesday, and about a month ago on the twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time. In this story of the healing of the ten lepers, I often wonder what was going on in the minds of the other nine, those who did not return to give thanks. Perhaps some wondered if they were ever really sick. Maybe they thought it was all in their head. Maybe others thought that their leprosy had been cured naturally, that it just went away. Maybe some of them thought that they had cured themselves, by some effort of their own. Maybe some of them realized that they had been cured, but presumed there would be time later to thank Jesus.

We don’t know their minds, but we do know our own minds, and we know that often we present these same excuses when we have received some gift from God. And so, in thinking of the gift of our redemption, perhaps there are some who believe they were never in need of redeeming. Perhaps there are some who think they can cure themselves or that eventually their spiritual sickness will go away on its own. Perhaps, there are some who just don’t take the time or make the

effort to thank God for what He has done for us in Christ Jesus. I would suspect most of us, at least from time to time, fall into this category.

The call, of course, is for us to respond as the Samaritan did, the one among the ten, who recognized that he was ill, that he was in need of healing, who recognized that he had been healed, and who stopped in his tracks, who returned glorifying God, and who fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked Him.

Like the other lepers, we don't know what happened to the Samaritan after this, but I have to believe that his thanks was more than superficial. There is evidence of this in the fact that the text says he "returned, glorifying God," not just quietly to himself, but "*in a loud voice*," and in the statement Jesus makes *after* the man had already been healed, "Stand up and go; your *faith* has saved you." His healing was more than exterior, and from all signs his thanks was more that exterior. And so, our thanks must be more than exterior, but must express itself in loving service of God and neighbor.

At the root of every vocation is a profound thanks to God for all that He has done and a desire to give something in return. And so, we pray, brothers and sisters, in thanksgiving to God tonight, especially for the priests, deacons and religious who have served us. And we pray that many more will recognize the healing that is theirs in Christ and will respond generously from that place of deepest gratitude.