

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Thankfulness-- a Life Stance

I used these words of St. Paul to his beloved people of Colosse as the theme for a recent Baccalaureate homily to the graduates of St. John Fisher College:

"Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness," (Col. 3:15) I can think of no finer challenge offered to anyone to grow as a person. A mother of one of the graduates remarked after the ceremony that the words that had made her life worth living were "I thank you." And I am sure that all of us would agree.

What does it mean to dedicate oneself to thankfulness? What is thankfulness? Thankfulness is no small virtue. It is much more than politeness, much more than observing certain amenities of social life. Thankfulness is not simply a matter of words; it is a life-stance. It is a way of looking at reality, at life.

Thankfulness has two faces. With one face it looks to the past and remembers — with joy, or, if not always with joy, at least with serenity. The other face of thankfulness looks to the future with anticipation and hope and responsiveness.

If I may express this in another way: thankfulness has a memory. It is the recognition of all the things that have been done for me and all the things I have been able to do. It is a recognition of all that has been given to me and all that I have accomplished. It is a joyful remembrance of the friendships I have made and the love that these friendships imply.

But, while rooted in the memory and linked to the past, thankfulness is also a thrust into the future. The psalmist cries out: "What return shall I make to the Lord for all that He has done for me?" Thankfulness is an awareness of indebtedness, an awareness that we owe something, an awareness that something is being asked of us.

That is why I say that thankfulness is more than a mood of the moment; it is truly a life-stance. It is a way of looking at the whole of life and the depths we have found in life and saying: gratia, grace. Gilbert Chesterton has a remarkable poem about grace:

You say grace before meals.
All right.
But I say grace before the play and the opera
and grace before I open a book,
and grace before sketching, painting, swimming,
walking, playing, dancing,
and grace before I dip the pen in the ink.

Thankfulness is a readiness to say YES to the future, because the past in so many ways has said YES to me. The past opens up a road into the future and thankfulness bids me follow that road — with a sense of awe and wonderment in the face of the future which gradually untolds for me.

But if thankfulness looks back to the past and ahead to the future, it is preeminently a virtue that stands firmly in the present moment. It is a sense of awe and wonderment at all that is. It tries to see each day and each moment of the day as a gift to be appreciated, a challenge to be met, a mystery to be shared. With e.e. cummings it can say:

I thank you God for most this amazing day.

Or with Chesterton in his poem called EVENING:
Here dies another day
during which I have had eyes, ears, hands
and the great world round me.
And with tomorrow begins another.
Why am I allowed two?

Thankful people look back on life and remember with gratitude all that has been done for them during their lives. We are thankful for parents and teachers and friends for the growth we have achieved, for the depths in life we have discovered.

But also we are thankful because we look ahead. We look ahead to the promises that the future holds

and if we are really dedicated to thankfulness, we look ahead, not with foreboding, but with a sense of indebtedness, with a sense that we have been called, with a sense that something is being asked of us.

I cannot tell you what is being asked of any of us, nor can anyone else. The future will gradually untold this. It may not always be an easy future. It will have its triumphs and its failures, its joys and its sorrows; but, if we are dedicated to thankfulness, we will be ready to answer the call of the future.

One thing I can say. If we are dedicated to thankfulness, we will find God in our lives. For thankfulness is a realization that what I have, I have been given. Thankfulness is an acknowledgment of my dependence: my need of others and especially my need of God. Only a thankful person can really believe in God.

May our lives be kept uncluttered by our own preoccupations and resentments and may gratitude allow us to create space in our hearts where God can reveal Himself and where anyone in need can enter our lives and ask for and receive compassion.

At the very heart and center of our lives we have the Eucharist — a 'thank you' celebration which challenges us to be grateful people. What does it mean to us when each liturgy reminds us of our vocation to proclaim the mystery of our faith?

This imaginative Eucharistic meditation has touched me. I hope it will find resonance in your hearts.

He was old, tired and sweaty,
pushing his homemade cart
down the alley, stopping now and then
to poke around in somebody's garbage.
I wanted to tell him about EUCHARIST
But the look in his eyes
the despair on his face,
the hopelessness of somebody else's life in his
cart.
Told me to forget it.
So I smiled, said "Hi" — and gave him

EUCHARIST.
She lived alone,
her husband dead,
her family gone,
And she talked at you, not to you,
words, endless words, spewed out,
So I listened — and gave her EUCHARIST.
Downtown is nice,
Lights change from red to green, and back
again,
Flashing blues, pinks and oranges.
I gulped them in,
Said, "Thank you, Father," — and made them
EUCHARIST.
I laughed at myself,
and told myself,
"You, with all your sin,
and all your selfishness,
I forgive you,
I accept you,
I love you."
It's nice, and so necessary to give yourself
EUCHARIST.
My Father, when will we learn — You cannot
talk EUCHARIST — you cannot philosophize
about it. YOU DO IT.
You don't dogmatize EUCHARIST.
Sometimes you laugh it, sometimes you cry it,
often you sing it.
Sometimes it's wild peace, then crying hurt,
often humiliating, never deserved.
You see Eucharist in another's eyes, give it in
another's hand held tight,
squeeze it in an embrace.
You pause EUCHARIST in the middle of a busy
day, speak it in another's ear, listen to it from a
person who wants to talk.
For EUCHARIST is as simple as being on time
and so profound as sympathy.
I give you my supper,
I give you my sustenance,
I give you my life,
I give you me,
I give you EUCHARIST.
(R. Voight from THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE)

The Role of the Holy Spirit

Following is the text of the address given by Pope Paul VI at the General Audience of May 10.

We are in the extremely important commemorative period which separates and unites two cardinal events in the history of religion in the world: the Ascension, that is, the glorious and mysterious exodus of Jesus Christ, after his resurrection, from the scene of this earthly life; and Pentecost, that is, for us Christians, the coming of the Holy Spirit to the group of the Lord's followers.



Obedient to the last recommendation he had made to them, they were awaiting, within a few days a "Baptism of the Holy Spirit."

They did not have a clear concept of this, but they remembered and certainly thought over the words that Jesus had said to them: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

Christian Pentecost marks one of the decisive dates for the history of mankind. It is a question of the birth of the Church. St. Augustine says: "What the soul is for man's body, such is the Holy Spirit for the (Mystical) Body of Christ which is the Church." It is a question of the infusion of the Spirit of God, of the supernatural animation of humanity which the Church carries out, of the presence and the action of

the promised Paraclete, third person of the Holy Trinity, one God, as is known, in three distinct Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit! He is the "Gift of God." He is God's love which is communicated and which multiplies the signs of his presence and his action, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are recalled in the conferring of the sacrament of Confirmation (wisdom and understanding, counsel and fortitude, knowledge and piety, and fear of God). And St. Paul writes to the Galatians: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, forbearance, meekness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, chastity."

The life of the Christian, who is "in God's grace," is like a garden in flower. We must always honor the Holy Spirit, seeing to it that we ourselves are the field of his blossoming. With this note concerning the spiritual activity of the Paraclete in the Christian soul, by means of sacramental action, "baptism gives the Holy Spirit as a sanctifying force, an inner power, which animates the Christian with the Spirit of Christ and will make him live like him. Confirmation is the new Pentecost of every Christian, which bestows the Spirit on him to make him an adult. He will no longer live only for himself, as a child does, but he will have a mission in the Church, the mission of every Christian to work for the Kingdom of God."

So let not Pentecost pass unobserved for us! Do not allow the Spirit to die out, we will repeat with St. Paul; but we will recommend to everyone to light, or re-light, the living flame of charity, which is precisely that of the Holy Spirit.