

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

It Is Right and Just to Give Thanks

The Eucharistic prayer which is proclaimed each day in our liturgy is always announced as the expected human utterance from people who should be ever conscious of their total indebtedness for gifts received. For who is there among us who can point to anything



we have with the claim of exclusive and justified personal possession? What do we have that has not been given to us by the provident gift of a Prodigal Father?

I am grateful for the prominence of Thanksgiving Day in our Church calendar with its special liturgy. I recall the first year of my priesthood when I asked my first pastor for permission to celebrate the liturgy at a convenient hour for people who wanted to enjoy a few extra hours of rest on a holiday. Mass was announced for 9:00 a.m. rather than the traditional 7:00 a.m., and the response was overwhelming. Evidently it was this grass roots' response from all over our land that led to the beautiful liturgy of today when we pause as a nation to remember our blessings and to express our gratitude.

Thanksgiving Day is EVERY DAY in the life of our Church. We cannot be part of each day's liturgy without listening to this exhortation — "Let us give thanks to the Lord," and being challenged with this response: "It is truly right and just always and everywhere to give thanks to the Lord our God," for Eucharist (Thanksgiving) is at the heart and center of our life.

I have always been grateful to Father Henri Nouwen for his reflection on the virtue of gratitude and its life-giving power as contrasted with resentment and the paralysis that it provokes. I have sent his pamphlet "From Resentment to Gratitude" to every

priest in our diocese in the hope that it might lead to their full personal liberation to be Eucharistic Ministers, i.e. ministers of a growing acceptance of the Lord and of His people — with hearts dilated by His love.

I recall a wise old man from my boyhood days. He had no degrees after his name, yet he seemed to bespeak the wisdom of the ages. I heard him say one day: "We are as old as our sins and as young as our gratitude."

The passing years have more deeply impressed on me the wisdom of his remark. What he was saying was this: Sin is a stagnation, a satisfaction with our own self-centeredness. Selfishness forfeits the power to wonder, to be enthusiastic, to have youthful hearts. Self-absorption shrinks the horizons of one's world. It encourages a complacency that welcomes nothing new. Fresh ideas find no home.

Gratitude is first and foremost a response. It is to stand in awe at the opportunities that life offers, to accept the option before us.

Gratitude is our recognition of enrichment by another. Expressed in a language of the heart, it glances back to see the source of our enrichment and looks to the future to be revitalized by new beginnings.

To give thanks is a primary response to life — to handle everything that lives as a gift to be cared for, nourished and brought to fulfillment. Gratitude opens us to new possibilities, new hopes and expectation. Gratitude makes us receivers instead of takers and allows us to see the pain and sufferings of our life not as disturbing interruptions but as invitations to a change of heart. Grateful people discover God as the God of history who is shaping and forming us day after day. Gratitude creates the space where God can reveal Himself and where anyone in need can enter our lives to seek and find compassion.

Gratitude dilates the human heart to leave access to the Spirit. It banishes the resentment that leaves no space for the Spirit and only welcomes our jealousies, our suspicions and revengeful thoughts as valuable possessions.

We need special days of Thanksgiving to educate us to be Eucharistic people, not as an isolated event which happens once a day or once a week, but as a constant expression of an understanding of life as a gift of God in Christ Jesus inviting us to unending gratitude.

This past Sunday's liturgy with our parish family of Rochester Institute of Technology reminded me forcefully in one of its meditations that gratitude is a daily declaration of personal helplessness:

"One of the touching legends that sprang up around the holy memory of St. Francis of Assisi tells how one day the saint walked up to an almond tree and said: Sister, speak to me of God;" and the almost tree blossomed.

This story in its way defines the best hopes of every Christian for a thanks-filled life. For we have all heard the world address the same demand to us. Sometimes shamefacedly, sometimes bluntly, sometimes subtly but always insistently, the world keeps saying: "Speak to me of God; do for me as Christ would."

This then should be our deeply cherished hope: that we may respond as beautifully, so dramatically, as thankfully, as did the almond tree. That is to say, we must project our life as a pursuit of grateful growth, so that the sheer strength and beauty of our life and work, our achievements, our thought and speech will speak loudly and clearly to the world: 'THANKS BE TO GOD!'

'The Church Prays and Wishes to Pray'

Following is the text of Pope John Paul's address at the Marian shrine at Mentorella, Italy.

From the opening of the Second Vatican Council, I have had the opportunity of staying in Rome several times, both for the work of the Council and for other tasks entrusted to me by Pope Paul VI.



On the occasion of these stays in Rome I have often visited the sanctuary of Our Lady of Mentorella. This place, hidden among the mountains, has particularly fascinated me. From it, one's eyes can range over and admire the magnificent view of the Italian landscape. I came here again a few days before the last conclave. And if today I have wished to return, it is for various reasons, which I will set forth now.

First, however, I want to apologize to my collaborators, to the local administration and to those who arranged this flight, for having given them additional trouble with my arrival. At the same time I greet cordially all the inhabitants of Guadagnolo, and all those who have gathered here from other localities nearby. I greet the custodians of this sanctuary, the Polish Fathers of the Resurrection and also the clergy of the surrounding districts with their bishop, Guglielmo Giaquinta.

We read in the Gospel of St. Luke that Mary, after the Annunciation went to the hill country to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth. When she arrived at Ain-Karin, she put her whole soul into the words of the canticle which the Church recalls every day in Vespers: "Magnificat anima mea Dominum" — "My soul

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magnifies the Lord." I wanted to come here, among these mountains, to sing the Magnificat in Mary's footsteps.

This is a place in which man opens to God in a special way. A place where, far from everything, but also at the same time close to nature, one can speak confidentially to God within himself. One feels within one what is man's personal call. And man must glorify God the Creator and Redeemer; he must in some way become the voice of the whole of creation in order to say, in its name, Magnificat. He must announce the great works of God, and, at the same time, express himself in this sublime relationship with God, because in the visible world only he can do so.

During my stays in Rome, this place helped me a great deal to pray. And that is another reason why I wanted to come here today. Prayer, which expresses in various ways man's relationship with the living God, is also the first task and almost the first announcement of the pope, just as it is the first condition of his service in the Church and in the world.

During these few days that have passed since Oct. 16, I have had the fortune to hear, from the mouths of authoritative persons, words which confirm the spiritual awakening of modern man. These words —

and that is significant — were spoken mainly by lay people who fill high offices in the political life of various nations and peoples.

They spoke often of the needs of the human spirit, which are not inferior to those of the body. At the same time they indicated the Church, in the first place, as capable of satisfying those needs.

Let what I say now be a first humble reply to everything I have heard: the Church prays, the Church wishes to pray, she wants to be in the service of the most simple and at the same time splendid gift of the human spirit, which is realized in prayer. Prayer is, in fact, the first expression of man's interior truth, the first condition of true freedom of the spirit.

The Church prays and wishes to pray in order to listen to the interior voice of the divine Spirit, so that he himself, in us and with us, may speak with the sighs, too deep for words, of the whole of creation. The Church prays, and wishes to pray, to meet the needs in the depths of man, who is sometimes so restricted and limited by the conditions of everyday life, by weakness, sin, discouragement and by a life that seems meaningless. Prayer gives a meaning to the whole of life, at every moment, in every circumstance.

Therefore the pope, as the Vicar of Christ on earth, wishes in the first place to unite with all those who strain towards union with Christ in prayer, wherever they may be: as a Bedouin in the steppe, or the Carmelites or Cistercians in deep enclosure, or the sick on a hospital bed in the sufferings of the death agony, or a person in activity, in the fullness of life, or oppressed and humiliated individuals . . . everywhere.

The Mother of Christ went to the hills to say her Magnificat. May the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit accept the pope's prayer in this sanctuary and grant the gifts of the Spirit to all those who pray.