

**Mass for Thanksgiving Day
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

November 28, 2013

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: last week, our country commemorated the 150th anniversary of one of the most famous speeches in American history, President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Through very short in length, the content was a rousing tribute to the sacrifices made by so many people in the interest of freedom so that "government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."¹ On display at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum here in Springfield are several essays from various famous individuals who offer reflections on the significance of this great speech and how it has impacted this country in a positive way.

In one of these letters, Retired Sergeant Allen J. Lynch, a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor, calls attention to the fact that President Lincoln ends his address with a reference to God as a reminder that the principles of equality and liberty are given to us by our Creator and as

such, can never be taken away from this country. Although there is some debate as to how religious President Lincoln was, he certainly was not shy when it came to invoking God in his various speeches, indicating, at the very least, a belief in the sovereignty of God and His providential care toward mankind.

This can be seen in a lesser-known document that the president issued in October of the same year. This proclamation established that the final Thursday of each November should be observed nationally as a “day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.”² President Lincoln was mindful of the fact that, even in the midst of the tragedy of the Civil War, God had still been generous in bestowing His blessings upon this country. In his proclamation, after recounting several of those blessings he wrote that: “No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God.”

It is for that same reason that we are gathered here today for the celebration of the Mass on this Thanksgiving Day. We come to give thanks to God for the many blessings He has given to us over the past year. By

doing this, we remind ourselves that these gifts are not merely the result of our hard work or good luck, but that they come from the God who is ever attentive to our needs and grants to us those things of which we are most in need. This form of prayer helps to keep us humble and is a reminder that without Him, nothing is possible.

Being thankful to God for our blessings is not always easy, as can be seen in the Gospel for today's Mass. In this story, there are ten lepers who approached Jesus, asking Him for healing. After He had granted their request, only one of them returned to give Him thanks. This episode shows us something very important with regards to prayer. It is often very easy for us to turn to God when we are in trouble or when we need something. Once that need is supplied, our lives go back to normal and we sometimes forget that God is responsible for those blessings. It is therefore important for us to develop the habit of constantly giving thanks to God for all of our blessings, both large and small. The Catechism states that "every event and need can become an offering of thanksgiving."³ St. Paul emphasizes this when he encouraged the Thessalonians with the following recommendation: "In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of

God for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Even though today is a day intended to focus on giving thanks, each day should be an occasion for us to express gratitude to God for our blessings.

In the conclusion of the 1863 proclamation by Abraham Lincoln, the president adds an important request that we would likewise do well to reflect on this day. He encouraged the country that, in addition to thanking God, we should express our penitence “for our national perverseness and disobedience” and “fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union.”

This final thought of the president is one that recognizes that while there may be many things for which we should thank God, there are still challenges that we face as a nation that require conversion and healing. We cannot just focus on our blessings but must also be aware of our struggles. Our recognition of how God has assisted us should give us the hope needed to not back down from those challenges, but face them with trust

and confidence in God that He will assist us in overcoming those obstacles we face personally and as a nation.

During the Year of Faith, which has just finished, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops encouraged Catholics throughout the country to make Fridays a day of fasting and abstinence from meat for the intention of the protection of life, marriage, and religious liberty. Given the recent legislation in our state with regards to marriage and the ongoing threats to religious liberty in our country, we should continue our prayers and sacrifices in that spirit of humble penitence, asking God to heal the wounds of our country in these areas. We do this while at the same time being mindful of the many blessings that God has showered upon us, giving us the hope to persevere in walking in the path of truth and encouraging others of the beauty of doing the same.

In just a few minutes, we will hear those words that we hear at every Mass: "Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God," to which we will respond: "It is right and just." It is truly right and just for us to give thanks to God on this day and every day for the many ways in which He continues to show His love for us. May our hearts to open to give Him thanks "always

and everywhere” and to trust that He will always be near to us and provide for all of our needs as we journey through this life toward the promised land of Heaven where we hope to be with Him and one another for all eternity.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, Bliss Copy.

² Abraham Lincoln, Proclamation of Thanksgiving, 3 October 1863.

³ CCC 2683.