

**Thanksgiving Day Mass  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield, IL**

**November 26, 2015**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here for this Eucharistic celebration to start this day on which our nation pauses to give thanks to God for the many blessings that He has bestowed upon us over this past year. Our presence here at the beginning of this national holiday is a reflection of our awareness that God is the one responsible for all that is good in our lives. We come before Him in humility with hearts full of gratitude for His goodness towards us as we participate in our greatest act of thanksgiving, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The prayer of thanksgiving is one of the five basic forms of prayer listed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Its treatment is rather brief, consisting of only two paragraphs. Such brevity, however, is not meant to diminish the important role that thanksgiving has in the life of a Christian disciple. In fact, the prayer of thanksgiving is so important that we are encouraged to practice it in every circumstance, for this, as St. Paul reminds us “is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess 5:18).

On the surface, the encouragement to give thanks in all circumstances seems to be fairly straightforward. In practice, however, it can be quite a challenge. We see this in the Gospel passage that we just heard. In the story of the ten lepers who were cured by Jesus, only one returned to give thanks to Him for what He had done. The story shows how easy it is for us to treat our relationship with Jesus as one of utility or convenience. We are quick to cry out to God for help in our times of need. When He answers those prayers in a positive way, we tend to feel that we no longer have a pressing need for Him and so we go back to life as normal, often forgetting to thank Him for the benefits He has bestowed on us, as seen with the ninety percent of those cured in this passage.

If it is so difficult to give thanks to God when things go our way, how much more difficult is it to thank Him when things do not seem to go our way? Yet, that is precisely what St. Paul encourages us to do – thanking God in *every* circumstance, the good *and* the bad.

Making the prayer of thanksgiving in every circumstance a habitual practice is not just a “fake it until you make it” type of exercise. God does not want us to be inauthentic in our prayers to Him, even if at times we may struggle in feeling as though we are just going through the motions.

What will help us in more easily fulfilling this request to thank God in every circumstance is to foster a supernatural perspective on life.

To have a supernatural perspective is to see “the hand of God in everything that happens to us: both in pleasant and unpleasant things, in times of consolation and in times of sorrow, as in the death of someone we love.”<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, this can be a difficult thing to do when we are so accustomed to judging things based on what we see and experience with our physical senses. As Catholics, though, we express our belief in things both “visible and invisible,” so we know that there is more to any given situation than what is on the surface.

In his Message for the upcoming World Day of the Sick next February, Pope Francis offers a helpful insight into approaching those difficult moments in our lives with the eyes of faith. He says the following:

Illness, above all grave illness, always places human existence in crisis and brings with it questions that dig deep. Our first response may at times be one of rebellion: Why has this happened to me? We can feel desperate, thinking that all is lost, that things no longer have meaning...In these situations, faith in God is on the one hand tested, yet at the same time can reveal all of its positive resources. Not

because faith makes illness, pain, or the questions which they raise, disappear, but because it offers a key by which we can discover the deepest meaning of what we are experiencing; a key that helps us to see how illness can be the way to draw nearer to Jesus who walks at our side, weighed down by the Cross.<sup>2</sup>

Whether it is illness, disappointment, failure, or any sort of negative experience that we face, we are invited to pause and remind ourselves to look at the situation through the eyes of faith which can bring us hope in an otherwise bleak situation.

In our second reading, St. Paul reminds us of an important truth that will serve to strengthen us in developing this supernatural outlook. He says that God “will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”(1 Corinthians 1:8-9). If we see God as a loving Father, we will trust there will never be a situation in which He will not provide us with the grace necessary to endure and overcome whatever trial we may face (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13).

These and other words handed down to us from St. Paul are not just pious words. Rather, they are an expression of his lived experience of

having Christ in His life. He faced many trials and sufferings, yet he always maintained that supernatural outlook. Because of that, he was able to put into practice his recommendation to give thanks in every circumstance. We too are called to foster that outlook which believes with a firm faith that the Lord who loves us so much is always close to us, even when our feelings and senses tell us differently. If we truly believe that, how can we not give Him thanks in every circumstance, for we know, as St. Paul says, "that all things work for good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

As we spend this day reflecting on our blessings, let us also call to mind the struggles that we have encountered over the past year. May we not neglect to add them to our prayer of thanksgiving, trusting that God, in His loving care for us, wants to use even those things to unite us more closely to Him and one another. Even if it feels a little foreign to us, doing this will be a step in fostering that supernatural outlook on life which we are all called to have as we continue our journey through this "veil of tears" on our way to the glory of the Resurrection in Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 247.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Message for the 24<sup>th</sup> World Day of the Sick 2016*, 15 September 2015.