

**Curia Thanksgiving Mass
Catholic Pastoral Center
St. Viator Chapel**

November 23, 2015

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here for our annual Curia Thanksgiving Mass during which we offer our gratitude to God for the many blessings that He has bestowed on us personally and for the ways in which He has used us as His instruments in blessing the faithful of our diocese. I personally express my gratitude to each of you for your generous and faithful assistance to me in my role as bishop.

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 are very willing to give thanks to God when good things happen, but when things do not seem to be going well, giving thanks to God is certainly not the first form of prayer that enters into our mind. Instead, we turn to God with the prayer of petition, asking that He do something about our pressing needs or present woes. Yet, the words of St. Paul still echo in our ears that we should give thanks to God, even in the midst of those challenging times.

Making the prayer of thanksgiving 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 fulfilling this request to thank God in every circumstance more easily 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.”¹ 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.²

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.

Our readings today offer some good examples of living with this supernatural outlook on life. In our first reading, Daniel and his companions resist the pressure to betray the dietary customs given through the Law. They made a deal with the steward in charge of them to give them only vegetables to eat. They trusted that by remaining faithful to what the Lord asked of them would result in their being cared for by the Him, and so it happened. A little later in the Book of Daniel, we see how that faith was put to the test again as the companions willingly submitted to being thrown into the fiery furnace, for they believed God would deliver them, which He did indeed do in a remarkable way.

In the Gospel for today's Mass, we heard the story of the poor widow who put two small coins in the treasury. She was praised by the Lord for while the others "made offerings from their surplus wealth...she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood" (Luke 21:4). In his recent *Angelus* address on this Gospel passage, Pope Francis offered the following reflection:

Because of her extreme poverty, she could have offered a single coin for the temple and kept the other for herself. But she does not want to just give half to God; she deprived herself of everything. In her poverty she understood that having God, she has everything; she feels totally loved by Him and in turn loves Him totally.³

It is with this same key of faith that we are all invited to approach every circumstance in our lives. We are invited to see, like that poor widow, that having God, we have everything, and because of that, we can give thanks to Him at all times.

As we spend these next few days 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.

¹ St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 247.

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

³ Pope Francis, *Angelus Address*, 8 November 2015.