

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

November 24, 2016

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, it is good that we gather this morning on a day that we as people of the United States observe a holiday devoted to Thanksgiving.

Today is indeed a national holiday, yet the essence of this day is nothing new for us as Catholics. By our very nature as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are people of gratitude. We acknowledge that all good things in this life come from God and the primary way that we recognize all that the Lord has given to us is the celebration of the Eucharist. We are people of gratitude.

Gratitude is one of the most attractive virtues a person can have, and fortunately it costs us nothing and requires no skill but the habit of common courtesy! Saying “thank you” is a mark of good manners that parents seek to instill in their children as soon as they are able to talk.

Today's national holiday of giving thanks parallels our Christian faith in reminding all of us – not only children – to say thank you to God.

It is fitting that our Gospel passage today features an act of gratitude. The Samaritan man returns to the Lord to thank Him for the healing of his leprosy. The Lord is surprised and even disappointed to discover that only one has come back in gratitude. The Lord's reaction tells us that when we receive a blessing from the Lord, gratitude is an expectation. The Lord goes on to tell the Samaritan that his faith has saved him. Gratitude was a part of the faith that saved him. Gratitude, then, has a saving power. It saves us from the feeling of self-sufficiency that can lead us away from our dependence on the Lord. It saves us from the feeling of entitlement that makes us averse to serving others.

Gratitude does indeed have a saving power and it is a virtue that, when put into practice, will lead to greater holiness. St. Paul knew this to be true. St. Paul often begins his letters with an expression of gratitude as he does in his letter to the Corinthians from our second reading today. He writes, "I give thanks to God always for the grace bestowed in Christ Jesus."

As children, we were taught to say thank you even when we received something we did not necessarily want. That is still the case even for adults. At different times in our life we will be given our share of illness, tragedy and grief. St. Paul says we should give thanks for whatever we receive.

St. Paul provides us an exceptional example of someone who lived the virtue of gratitude in all circumstances. Whether in good times or in bad, St. Paul gave thanks to Lord. And St. Paul was no stranger to the experience of hardship. He was often thrown into prison, beaten, nearly stoned to death, shipwrecked, and he was regularly persecuted for his preaching. Given all his experiences while still giving thanks to God, how can we fail to show gratitude to the Lord?

As citizens of this nation, yet first and foremost as Catholics, we express our gratitude for all that the Lord has done for us. And we pray for the grace to give back in some way for all that we have received. We seek to give of ourselves as a more profound expression of gratitude, just as Christ gives to us the gift of his very self.

Later today we will sit down to share a sumptuous Thanksgiving dinner. This is one of the great traditions of this national holiday. Yet today's feast is not primarily about the meal that will be served in our homes. Today's primary feast is the spiritual food that we receive here at Mass as the foretaste and promise of the heavenly banquet promised to those who follow our Lord. Partaking of this Eucharist gives us the courage to live a life overflowing with thanks, not just today, but every day of our lives.

May God give us this grace. Amen.