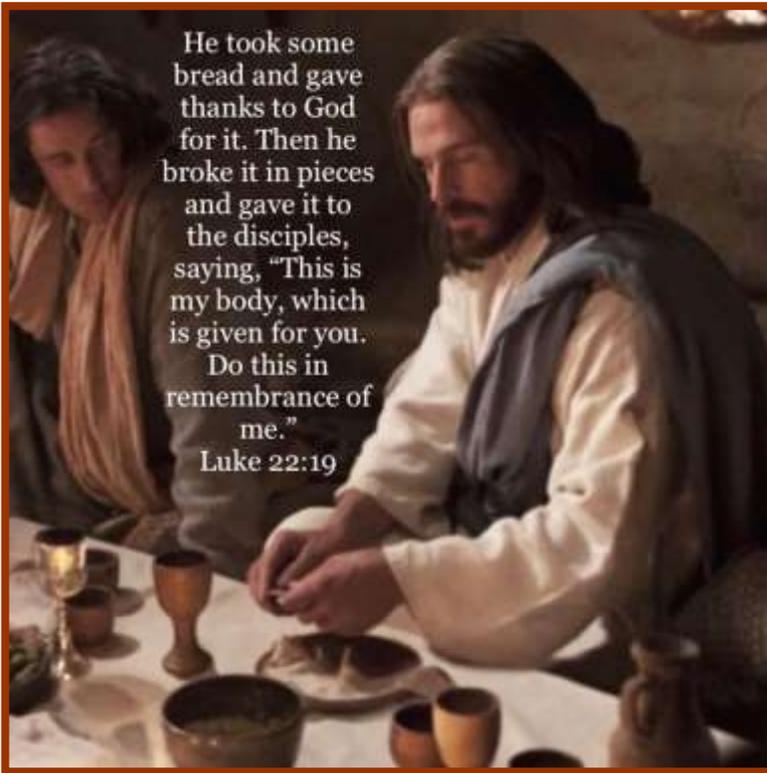


My Thanksgiving Sermon, Sunday October 9, 2022 ~ "The 3 Stages of Gratitude"



"Do this for the remembrance of me."

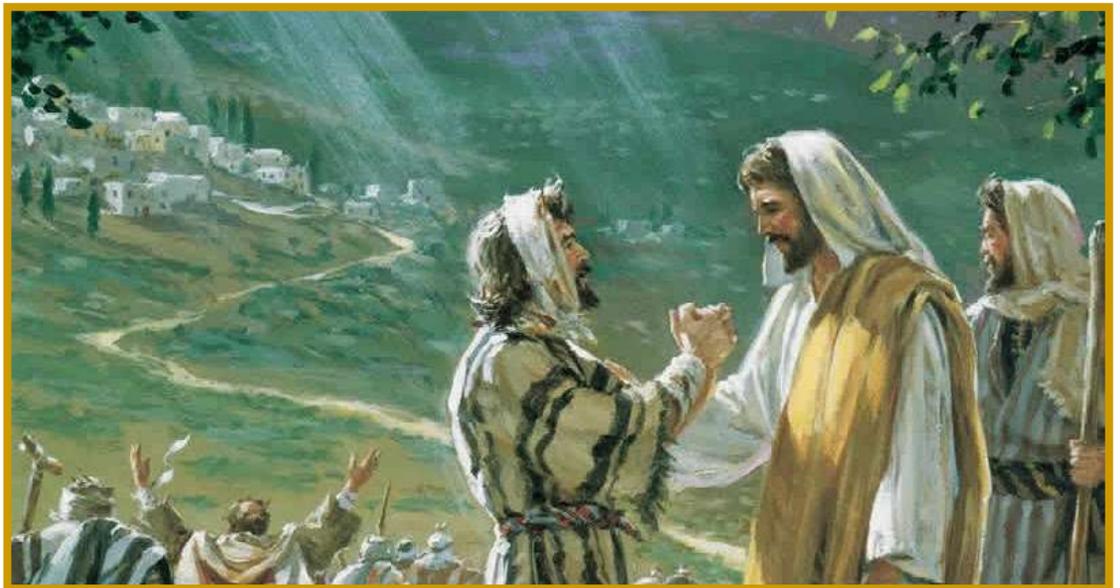
O Lord, on this Thanksgiving Sunday, give us grateful hearts, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

We had our annual 'Blessings of The Animal's service last Tuesday, October 4, and gave away our free-will offering to *Kitty Kare* and to the *Northern Dogs Feeding Program*. I told people that they couldn't bring any turkeys to be blessed at the service because they use such fowl language!

I then told another joke: A Christian was out for a hike in the Rockies and came across a grizzly bear. The bear started to charge the Christian. The Christian went down on his knees and started to pray, "*O Lord, make this bear go away.*" The Christian opened his eyes and the bear was still there and coming closer. So the Christian closed his eyes again and fervently prayed, "*O Lord, please make this bear a Christian!*" When he opened his eyes, he saw that the bear was also kneeling with his front paws clasped together in

prayer, "*For what I am about to receive may I be truly thankful!*"

On this **Thanksgiving Sunday**, I wish for you to come on a journey with me. This is a thanksgiving journey and it consists of 3 stages. This journey is tied in with our gospel passage for this morning from Luke 17, verses 11-19. Jesus is on a journey with his disciples. He is travelling from the Galilee down south to Jerusalem. As he enters a village he runs into 10 lepers. He tells them to go show themselves to the priests. The men with the serious skin disease were marginalized and unable to be part of the community. As they turned away from Jesus, they realized that they were healed. Imagine their rejoicing when the priests, the upholders of Jewish laws, told them that they could hug their wives and their children and go to synagogue again. One of the 10 men turns back to Jesus praising God. This man knows that it was God who healed all 10. Only 1 of the 10 shows gratitude and Jesus commends his faith.



We all want hearts of gratitude and we especially reflect upon this spirit of thanksgiving on Thanksgiving Sunday.

I said that our Thanksgiving journey consists of 3 stages:

Stage 1: Gratitude for the FOOD

On Thanksgiving we enjoy delicious food and I personally can't wait for turkey and stuffing and fresh cranberry sauce and my fluffy pumpkin pies. I beat the egg whites and carefully blend them with the pumpkin and the spices

and the sugar. The pie is light and delicious and, of course, I then make whipped cream to go along with it. We thank God for the harvest and for the hands that prepared the food and we are grateful.



Stage 2: Gratitude is about REMEMBERING

We also go deeper and we cultivate a spirit of GRATITUDE for all of our blessings. Millions of Canadians will be thinking about what they are thankful for. The spirit of a thankful heart is something that children of all ages can understand and relate to. We remember key joyful events and we are thankful. We reflect upon all of our memories that make us people of gratitude.

An American psychologist, **Dr. Robert Emmons** is a gratitude expert. In his book, *Gratitude Works*, he writes how he has studied and researched the connection between gratitude and memory. The Christian tradition has Litanies of remembrance that integrate gratitude and memory.

When Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist, he asked us to do these actions of taking bread and wine, blessing bread and wine, breaking the bread, and giving it *“in memory of me . . . for the remembrance of me.”* An important part of Jesus' actions is that he did this all in the spirit of giving thanks.

Dr. Emmons says it very clearly: **Gratitude is about remembering.** And many times we don't even realize that we have become forgetful about all the freedoms we take for granted. People of gratitude draw on our positive memories and we cultivate gratitude and give thanks for all the gifts we receive, the grace we receive that is not earned or merited. Dr. Emmons has discovered through his research that gratitude transforms our lives and leads to the healing of our hearts.

Gratitude. Memory. Hearts. They are all connected.

There is a French proverb that states that *gratitude is the memory of the heart.* *“La reconnaissance est la memoire du Coeur.”* This proverb was coined by a deaf French educator Jean-Baptiste Massieu. Massieu was a Bishop in France during the 1700's and he later renounced his vows in order to marry.

We must remember and we must learn to remember. We must learn to be grateful and the fruit of gratitude is that we learn to become kind to others. The truth is that it feels good to be grateful.

Gratitude is so much more than what is spoken with the lips. The full and the true thanksgiving comes from the heart.

I said we were on a thanksgiving journey of 3 stages (Stage 1 ~ Gratitude to God for the food. Stage 2 ~ Gratitude and Remembering the good times and the blessings).

As we mature as disciples of Christ, we don't stop after Stage 2. We keep going deeper . . .

Stage 3: The Hard Spiritual Work of Gratitude

Henri Nouwen was a priest, a professor, writer and theologian. He died nearly 30 years ago in Toronto.

Here is what priest and author Henri Nouwen wrote in *The Spiritual Work of Gratitude*.

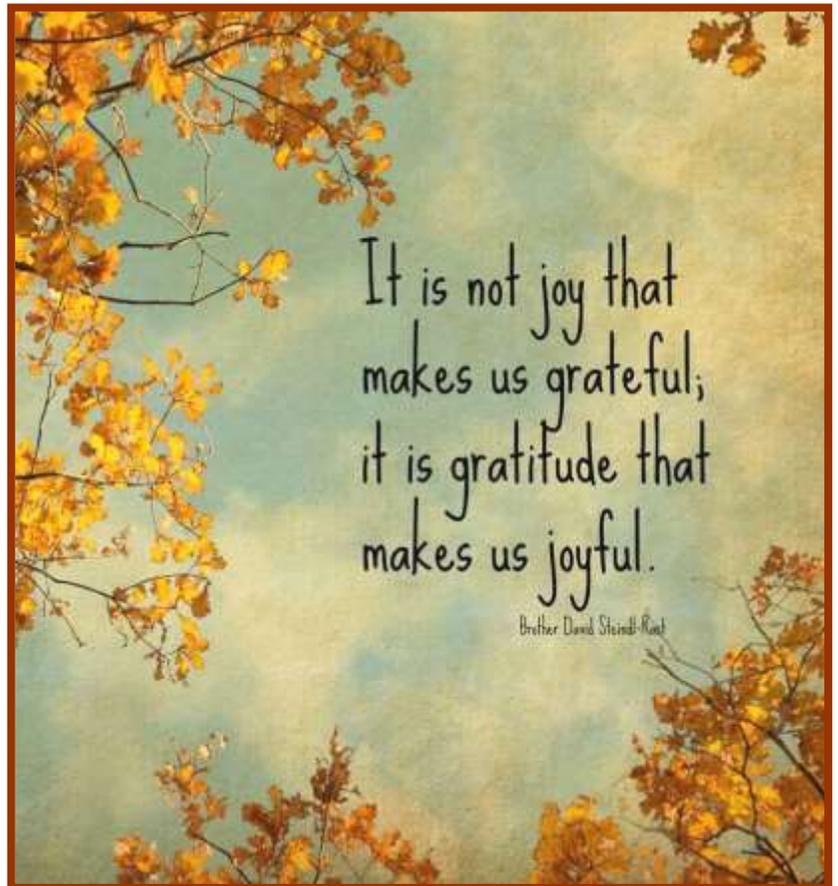
*“To be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives is easy, but to be grateful for all of our lives — the good as well as the bad, the moments of joy as well as the moments of sorrow, the successes as well as the failures, the rewards as well as the rejections — that requires **hard spiritual work**. Still, we are only **truly grateful people when we can say thank you to all that has brought us to the present moment**. As long as we keep dividing our lives between events and people we would like to remember and those we would rather forget, we cannot claim the fullness of our beings as a gift of God to be grateful for.”*

If we are willing to go to Stage 3, we begin by knowing that we are not alone. God is with us and we learn to sing in the sunshine and also in the rain.

Nouwen is right. This is hard spiritual work. We learn to remember with gratitude **the good and the bad**. We do not pretend the bad isn't real, but we acknowledge that there are blessings in the bad.

Do I wish that Jouni did not have a severe stroke on May 31 in Spain? Yes, I wish this every day and I wish that we could have seen it coming so we could have done something about it. I've spent many sleepless hours reviewing our days and wondering why I did not see any signs that this would happen.

Do I wish that we had been able to walk the last 6 days of the 800 km of the *Camino de Santiago* and walk into Santiago with Daniel from the parish and our good friend, The Rev. Steven Scribner? Yes, of course.



Through walking with Jouni throughout the last 4 months, I have come to see with new eyes the love and dedication that it takes for a spouse to be a 'caregiver.' I knew this reality with my head but I am now living it with my heart. I have come to appreciate each of you even more, and I love you even more. Jouni's strength (what the Finns call **SISU**) blesses me every day. I have come to acknowledge our fragility in our earthly bodies and how plans can change in an instant. I know that without God at my side, I would not be able to continue to preach his word. I see the mercy of God at work through all of our pain and the real changes in our life together as a couple.

Gratitude as a discipline involves a conscious choice. I can choose to be grateful even when I am feeling sad. I can practice choosing gratitude over complaints. Is this easy? Absolutely not, but it does get easier. However, when I am very tired I find it nearly impossible to do and, like the psalmist, I lament and cry out about the unfairness of it all. But then I get rest and the next day is easier.

Let's not be afraid to look at everything that has brought us to where we are now and trust that we will soon see in it the guiding hand of a loving God.

I believe that it is in this hard spiritual work of remembering both the good and the bad that our souls grow,

and we discover more about what our generous God wishes to teach us.

In Stage 1, we are grateful for earthly blessings. In Stage 2, we remember and we thank God for our spiritual blessings.

In Stage 3, we go deeper and we acknowledge that gratitude can be lived as a spiritual disciple.

♥ *“With all that I am and all that I have,
I honour you in the name of God.”* ♥

(p. 545, *BAS*)

This promise is part of the wedding service for the giving and receiving of rings and I had a couple whom I married just yesterday repeat these precious words.

We can apply these same words to our life of gratitude. Gratitude claims the truth that all that I am and all that I have comes from God.

And 1 of the 10 healed lepers acknowledged this truth and returned to Jesus with a heart of gratitude.

October 9, “Thanksgiving Sunday,” 2022 ~
Let’s commit before God to live the words of the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians:

“Give thanks in all circumstances.”

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+

The Venerable Deborah H. Kraft
Rector, *St. Paul’s*
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