



Giving Thanks in Troubled Times **A Thanksgiving Reflection from Bishop Paul J. Bradley**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In these late November days, we Americans are about to celebrate one of our most treasured national holidays, Thanksgiving. Even though we realize that we are far from being out from under the ongoing effects of COVID-19, and here in southwest Michigan we continue to see an increase of people testing positive for the virus, we are ever mindful as People of Faith of our many God-given blessings. As each of us prepares for how we will celebrate with family and friends, I am confident that among our list of prayer intentions will be the end of this pandemic and the complete defeat of this virulent virus.

All holidays can be hard for people who are in poor health, homeless, or who are experiencing emotional or financial difficulties, and perhaps that's even more true when the holiday is centered on gratitude. Especially during these unprecedented times, many people are struggling to celebrate their blessings. Let us be sure to include in our prayer intentions those who are less fortunate than we are, especially those who may be alone; may God's blessings and graces bring them comfort, and may we do all that we can to extend our help to them in every way.

For us as People of Faith, it is impossible to express gratitude in a general way. Our thanks go to the God who created us and who sustains us by His grace. And for us People of Faith who are Christians/Catholics, we believe that our God became a person – Jesus Christ our Lord and the King of the Universe – who loves us and who cares about each one of us. When we give thanks to Jesus, our gratitude becomes even more intimate and personal.

The Synodal process that our Holy Father has called the Universal Church to begin, and which is well underway in our Diocese and in Dioceses throughout the world, provides us with an opportunity to express our gratitude for the chance to *walk together with* and *listen to* our sisters and brothers in Christ. We are reminded that we are not alone. We have been called together by the Holy Spirit who forms us into a Community of Faith, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. This same Holy Spirit serves as an Advocate for us in times of trouble. He comforts and guides us as we travel together on our pilgrimage through this world to our heavenly home.

During this *Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit*, we should be especially grateful for the Holy Spirit's manifestation of God's closeness, and His tender love, especially in difficult circumstances. As Pope Francis wrote in *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, p. 19:

“God is never indifferent. The essence of God is mercy, which is not just seeing and being moved but responding with action. God knows, feels, and comes running out to look for us. He doesn't just wait. Whenever in the world you have a response that is immediate, close, warm, and concerned, offering a response, that's where God's Spirit is present.”

Among the greatest blessings God has given us is the Gift of Jesus Himself to us in the Holy Eucharist (ευχαριστία = from the Greek word for “thanksgiving”). We should never take for granted the wonderful privilege it is for us to be able to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, and to become one with Him as members of His Body the Church. The best, and only appropriate, response we can possibly make to our good and gracious God for this Gift of Himself to us is a heartfelt “Thank you”!

On Thanksgiving Day, in addition to the Eucharist, we also give special thanks to God for the many blessings in our lives. That includes the gift of life itself, our parents and families, the love that we share with spouses and children, our friends, our freedom as Americans, our vocation as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ, our material possessions, our intellectual gifts and talents, and much, much more.

Gratitude is a powerful virtue. It opens our hearts to the healing power of God’s grace. It helps us look beyond our own selfish wants and fears to the gifts we receive from others, and to the opportunities we have to share with others and to return thanks to God for all that He has generously given to us. Giving thanks is one of the most effective means we have of maintaining a balanced perspective in times of adversity. It helps us from sinking into hopelessness and despair by reminding us of all the goodness we have received from those who love and care for us—in good times and in hard times.

In spite of the difficulties we experience, and the significant social problems our country is presently going through, and even as COVID-19 continues to make our lives more challenging, our God continues to walk with us, and is always ready to forgive us. Shouldn’t we be willing to do the same for one another? Shouldn’t we have the faith and the courage to continue our synodal journey, looking beyond our own needs, wants and fears and giving thanks for the abundant gifts we have received from God?

On this Thanksgiving Day 2021, let us offer special prayers of gratitude to God for all His blessings, and for all the people in our lives who have shared their gifts with us, especially during times of hardship and difficulty. In this regard, the words of St. Paul in his first Letter to the Thessalonians seems particularly appropriate:

“Pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Holy Spirit.” (1 Thes.5:17-19)

Whether we travel elsewhere, or plan to welcome others to our homes, I pray that all of us will have a wonderful, safe and healthy celebration. Thanksgiving is such a special holiday, I believe, because we all take the time to remember how blessed we are, even in the midst of these troubled times. At the top of our list of those to whom we are grateful, let us make sure that we begin with our Loving God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – to thank God for everyone He has given us: family, friends, coworkers, strangers and even those with whom we disagree or with whom we do not get along. May our prayers of thanksgiving have the power to bring us hope, healing and great joy. May we thank God always for His goodness to us! Happy Thanksgiving!

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley

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