

21 November 2012  
Eve of National Thanksgiving

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“It Is Right to Give Him Thanks and Praise”

Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-10; Philippians 4:6-20; Luke 17:11-19

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

*The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.*

*Lift up your hearts.  
We lift them up to the Lord.*

*Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
It is right to give Him thanks and praise.*

*It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord . . .*

You all recognize those words. They are the opening words of the Lord's Supper liturgy that we speak or sing every week. For the Church does not give thanks to God but once a year, but each and every week; and the believer, each and every day. At least we should. Thanksgiving is all over the Scriptures. It simply goes with faith.

*But we need reminding sometimes, don't we?* For sometimes we are like that one leper who returned to give thanks to Jesus for His gifts, but perhaps nine times out of ten we are like the others . . . perhaps too busy to give thanks, perhaps forgetting to give thanks, perhaps not liking what we have received and so not giving thanks, perhaps taking the gifts of our Lord for granted, perhaps not even realizing all that our Lord is giving and providing for us everyday, or perhaps a hundred other reasons. It's easy to do.

*So sometimes we need reminding.* That's what Moses was doing with the people of Israel as they stood on the border of the Promised Land and were about to enter. **Don't forget**, he is telling them. *Don't forget who you were, where you came from, how you got to this good land. When you “eat and [are] full, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you.”* Take care, lest you forget, he

*says. Lest you forget that you were once slaves. Lest you forget that the Lord brought you out of Egypt. Lest you forget that He led you through the wilderness and provided for you the whole way. Lest you forget that the land was inherited by mercy not by merit. Beware, lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth.*

*Don't forget . . . but they did forget, once things got good in the Promised Land. Just as we forget. It's not that we're unthankful, but it's a symptom that our faith and love and hope are not always in the right place. That we're clinging to the gifts instead of the Giver, to the creation instead of the Creator, to the loved instead of the Lover. It's easy to do.*

So the Apostle Paul reminds us as well: ***Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.***

*With thanksgiving.* Notice that. Paul doesn't say: *let your requests be made known to God and then when He answers them the way you want, give Him thanks.* No, he says that your prayers and supplications *should be made with thanksgiving* - that whatever your good and gracious Lord decides to do and however He answers your prayer, give thanks. Whatever the circumstance, whatever the outcome, give thanks. He will do what is best.

Maybe what gives extra weight to these words of Paul is that he writes them from prison. What was going on for him right then we wouldn't say was good and deserving of thanks! But faith knows that our Father will work good, even through difficult times, and so gives thanks.

So I was thinking of the folks in New York and New Jersey, some still homeless and many still hungry and cold and confused a month after the superstorm blew through. What kind of thanksgiving will they have? What do they have to be thankful for? . . . But amazingly, it is folks like that, the folks who have the least, the folks who have been through the wringer, who often are the most thankful. Because what they have gone through has focused their faith and love and hope where it should be - not on the things of this world, but on the Giver of all things. On the One who gives not only the things of this world and life, but the things of our Promised Land and eternal life.

And so it was, perhaps, for that lone leper who returned. He might have thought that God is everywhere and so just dropped to his knees and thanked God. Or, He might have thought that since he was going to the Temple anyway, to show himself to the priests, just do it there - why bother to go back. *But his faith drives him to the*

*feet of Jesus.* His faith and love and hope focused on this man whose word does what it says. Who speaks and it happens. Who is the Master not only of lepers, but all creation. And at the feet of Jesus in thanksgiving, he alone hears: ***Rise and go your way, your faith has made you well.*** And while the others were healed as well, he alone was healed and saved in the fullest sense of that word - not simply cleansed from leprosy, but cleansed from the leprosy of sin and rescued from death by Jesus.

And so we too are gathered this night at the feet of Jesus - those feet once tiny in the manger, once dusty and dirty as they walked this earth, once pierced with nails and attached to the cross, and which soon will come again and put all enemies under those feet. We are gathered at His feet for He Himself comes to us here in that same Body and Blood to feed us with His forgiveness, life, and salvation. And we hear His Word: *This is My Body . . . This is My Blood . . . given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.* And we are rescued, we are saved.

*Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
It is right to give Him thanks and praise.*

And with our faith and love and hope thus in the right place, we thank Him for everything else as well: the bounties of our land, the freedoms we enjoy, the food on our tables, the clothing on our backs, the roof over our heads, the family and friends that bless us. All gifts from Him. And we thank Him not only for ourselves and what we have received, but also for those who do not give thanks, or forget to give thanks. That's our priestly duty - that in all things and for all things, our Lord receive thanks and praise. It is what we do. It goes with faith.

So however it was for you this year - whether you find yourself on the doorstep of the Promised Land, or in prison like Paul, or suffering with leprosy - you have been the recipient of God's rich grace in Jesus, as you will next year and every year. Our earthly situations change, but He never changes. And so we give thanks to the Lord, *for His steadfast love endures forever.*

*Lift up your hearts . . . let us give thanks to the Lord our God . . .*

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.