

Thanksgiving Eve
November 25, 2015
Always Giving Thanks for Everything
Ephesians 5:20
Rev. George Ferch

Dearly loved by God, “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is our text.

“Thank you for the world so sweet, thank you for the food we eat. Thank you for the birds that sing. Thank you God for everything.” This thanksgiving prayer my mother taught me when I was a child. That “everything” may include some unpleasantness God gives us in loving discipline for our good. It is not quite so easy to say then, “Thank you, Lord. May I have another?”

National Thanksgiving prompts Christians to ponder the daily bread and the all-encompassing mercy God bestows upon us day after day. Our observance also exposes our sinful failures to acknowledge God as the Giver, and thank him. At times, we are more like the nine lepers, than the one.

The evidence of God’s goodness is everywhere. Our failure to fully appreciate that goodness is all too real. Our divine worship tonight is not only to thank God. It is also a time to repent for taking God’s good gifts for granted, as if we had them coming.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, may we follow the Apostle Paul’s vital action in our hearts, **Always Giving Thanks for Everything.**

How different for you is this Thanksgiving than last year? Did you have much to be thankful for a year ago, but nothing this year? Don’t we continue to have much to be thankful for? We say with the hymn writer, “When all your mercies, O my God, My waking soul surveys, Transported with the view, I’m lost In wonder, love and praise.” CW 259 s.1.

Being thankful is not the same as merely feeling thankful, or just saying, “Thanks.” Paul was writing about being thankful “in your heart to the Lord.” How likely is it you never have thought on Thanksgiving Day, or on one of the other 364 days, “Why is it I don’t feel more thankful to the Lord?” Or, we might feel like little children who say thanks only because someone told them to say it. You know, that deep, sincere, heartfelt response you get after telling them, “Now say thank you.” Someone once said, “You can train a parrot to say the right words but where are you going to find a truly thankful parrot?”

Being thankful in the heart is “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It means using that thankfulness the way God means for us to use it. When we are thankful for our food, we use it to make us strong to glorify God, and love our neighbor. We do not complain about not having something else to eat, or wasting what we have. Being truly thankful for our spiritual food, the Word of God, and thankful for our Savior, means we hear the Word often, and stay close to Jesus.

King David knew that his sinful heart was ungrateful like ours is not thankful. David went to the Lord with a prayer that we so often speak. It serves us well for being thankful to God, not just saying the words. David wrote, “Create in me a pure heart, O God; and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” [Ps 51:10] That steadfast, or right, spirit is itself a gift from God. Only the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart, a new will that holds and practices the genuine humility and gratitude that are foreign to our sinful hearts. Without humility genuine gratitude is impossible.

The sin of pride in our hearts prevents us from being thankful, from accepting and using God’s blessings the way he commands. The person who thinks he is worth more than he is getting,

complains about not getting more. The person who thinks she is due what she is getting thinks she gets it what she deserves, unless, of course, it is not good or not what she wants.

Only after the Holy Spirit makes our hearts conscious of such sinful pride through the law do we realize we deserve nothing but God's anger and punishment. Then, we appreciate the water that comes out of the faucet that quenches our thirst, and every breath of fresh air we breathe that gives us life. We see these simple and necessary things as gifts of our Father's love. Comparing what we deserve and what we receive, our hearts no longer complain, but will be "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So long as we see only our sins, there is no reason for true thanksgiving. We would live only in ingratitude. So the Holy Spirit comes to us also with the comforting, life changing power of the good news that Jesus Christ has redeemed us from those sins. Looming largest before us in our divine worship and daily lives is the cross of Christ. Living in thankful faith becomes our way of life rather than something I choose to do or not do depending on my mood.

"Thank you God for everything," agrees with God's Word. How wise our Christian mothers are! Thanking God for everything means also accepting and using even what only seems to be harmful. Even what humanly speaking is unwanted God uses to work for our good. No discipline is pleasant at the time. Bearing a cross or crosses is harder than not. Yet through the lens of the gospel we see plenty of reasons for "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Thank you, God, for the sorrows that bring my heart closer to you in prayer, and the strength you give me through Word and sacrament. Thank you for my weaknesses and failures that make me realize how helpless I am, and how much I need your power. Thank you for illness and injuries that my Great Physician promises to sanctify. Our Savior Jesus Christ bore all our weaknesses and sorrows. He overcame our temptations and sins.

The Lord Jesus Christ is our Savior through whom we address God as our Father. In Christ God loves us with an everlasting love that will never let us go. The Father's love lifted Christ up on his cross and then lifted him out of his tomb in new life and glorious rule. God has graciously imputed this new life and glorious rule to us.

It is OK to take one day of the year to recall certain things I am thankful for. It is even better and in keeping with Paul's expectation to do it this way, "Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Amen. <SDG>