

Thanksgiving Message 2010

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Once again, our nation pauses to celebrate Thanksgiving. Our tables will be spilling over with food and our homes will resonate with laughter and conversation as we gather to celebrate this special day. While this holiday is a great blessing for us, it is the “once again” part that can anesthetize us to its beauty. With this in mind, allow me to share some personal reflections with you in the hope that we will all savor more than just the turkey this year and remember to take in all the blessings God bestows upon us.

While we dedicate one day out of the year as Thanksgiving Day, I am reminding myself that as Catholics, we are called to give thanks every moment of our lives. I remember hearing about an older man who had a stroke. Whenever he was asked how he was, he would reply, “I am grateful.” This was his one and only response. Clearly, his stroke had taught him the beauty of each moment. He knew deep within his heart that God never ceases to give his good gifts and we should never cease to give thanks. Thanksgiving is an attitude that permeates our entire lives and gives meaning to all we do. So, I am praying that this Thanksgiving will get lost in the litany of thanks I give to God every day.

It may seem like a difficult task to find something that prompts my gratitude day in and day out, yet it is amazing to realize the great diversity of gifts that God gives us. Just when we think we’ve seen it all, God surprises us with a new path in life, a new friend, a new talent discovered, or a new gift. We are greatly blessed in our country with so many different cultures, traditions, customs, artistic expressions and points of view. There is never a time in our lives when we have nothing for which to thank God. I remember reading about a postal worker who had the same mail route for over 20 years. While I could see myself becoming easily bored by the same path every day, he determined that he was going to see one thing new and different each and every day. He had an eye for God’s beauty in creation and realized that he saw things, not simply because they were beautiful, but also they were beautiful because he saw them.

I can hear some saying, “Well, that’s just fine and dandy, but what about those whose lives are a daily drudgery or those who carry the cross of sickness or poverty?” I agree that in these situations it is indeed difficult to give thanks and yet even there, God is at work in us, calling us to new life and giving us reasons for which to be thankful. I remember visiting a woman in the hospital who had just about every illness imaginable. As these illnesses began to come upon her, she was very angry with God and found that she was becoming extremely bitter. Paradoxically, the sicker she got, the more she realized that she was looking for happiness in all the wrong places. Her true happiness was in finding God and in realizing that he had never abandoned her, but was holding her even more closely during her time of illness. She realized that we have here no lasting city, and that her final goal in life was to be one with

God forever. Her illnesses forced her to see beyond the superficiality of her life and to realize that God and his love never falter, never waver and are always there.

As we celebrate Thanksgiving this year in our nation, it is my prayer that all of us in the Diocese of Salt Lake City will offer a continual prayer of Thanksgiving to our loving and gracious God. I hope that we will never tire of finding new reasons, new gifts that prompt us to thank God always. And I pray especially that those of us who are carrying heavy crosses over the holiday will see beyond the shadow of the cross and discover anew a loving God who supports us and unites us with the sufferings of his Son. It is this same Jesus Christ who will turn our mourning into joy, our sorrow into gladness and who will give us yet another reason to give thanks.

May you all have safe journeys in your comings and your goings this holiday week and may the Lord Jesus Christ, who never ceases to give thanks to his loving Father, raise his arms of benediction over all of us this Thanksgiving Day.