

Thanksgiving Day – November 22, 2018 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 9:00am Mass – 475 words

Ten were healed – only one (that is, 10% of them) returned to say thanks.¹ It is good that we are here today, as part of that proverbial 10%, to thank God for all that he has both given and permitted us to have, to experience, to live over this past year. That includes the good and the bad, the difficult and the easy, the painful and the joyful, the unforgettable and those things we may wish we could forget. For all of it, we are bound to give thanks to God, who has numbered the hairs on our head,² from whom not a single detail escapes; he who made us, sustains us, loves us, and wishes to save us.

St. Paul puts it very simply in his first letter to the Thessalonians: “give thanks in all circumstances”, he says; “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”.³ The imperative of gratitude, then, evidently does not depend upon our understanding or feelings; no, it comes from God’s will, which is a constant amidst the ups and downs of life. Sometimes, looking at what is happening in our lives, we do understand and feel good about it, and from the heart we can say, “Thank you, Lord, for your love”. Other times, we do not understand, or it does not feel good; but at least we could say, “Thank you, Lord, for loving me this way”.

The practice of gratitude, then, helps us to see that even the most difficult day is a gift – another day to live with God here and now and to prepare for life with him for ever in the world to come. For nothing can separate us from his love, as St. Paul also teaches: “for I am certain”, he says, “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”.⁴ Giving thanks to God thus helps us to depend more fully upon him; to be content with what we have.

On this Thanksgiving Day we discharge our duty to be grateful in the most effective way possible: by coming to Holy Mass, the Church’s greatest prayer, the offering of Christ himself. Pope Paul VI taught that “to visit the Blessed Sacrament is... a proof of gratitude, an expression of love, and a duty of adoration toward Christ our Lord”.⁵ What intentions do we bring to the altar in proof of our gratitude today? What graces do we seek going forward? May one of them be a more ready spirit of thanksgiving in every circumstance of our life, in humble recognition of the will of God for us in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

¹ The reference is to the gospel for this day, Luke 17:11-19.

² Cf. Luke 12:7.

³ 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

⁴ Romans 8:38-39.

⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei* (3 September 1965), no. 66. Cited in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1418.