

THE VICAR'S CORNER:

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Thanksgiving: It is Truly Right and Just

Many people have been taught from early childhood to say “thank you” in response to a gift or an act of kindness. This formation teaches us that being thankful is part of being well-mannered. This is true, but giving thanks is more significant than merely being polite. Our faith tells us that giving thanks is a necessary part of being a good Christian. This is especially true with respect to God—thanksgiving is part of what we owe to God in justice for everything He has given and done for us.

The need for giving thanks to God is expressed clearly in the Preface at Mass. The Preface begins with a dialogue between the celebrant and the people, including the exchange, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right and just.” After this, most of the Prefaces continue with the celebrant addressing the Lord in these or similar words, “It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.” These are powerful words which can easily be glossed over if we are not paying close attention. In particular, it is important to notice that to give God thanks is both our duty and our salvation. These are bold statements, and they deserve further explanation.

Why would giving God thanks be both a duty and necessary for our salvation? In short, it is because giving thanks to God is a necessary part of our response in love to the God who is Love. We can only be saved by God if we are in a right relationship with Him. So, the need for giving thanks to God is part of having our relationship with God rightly ordered. Giving thanks to God is both a duty and a need for salvation; it would be helpful to look at both of these points separately.

First, thanksgiving to God is a duty. It is more than just an attitude or emotion of gratefulness; rather, thanksgiving to God is part of the virtue of religion whereby we give of ourselves to God in sacrifice as a response to God’s giving every good thing to us. Religion comes from the Latin roots “re” and “ligare,” meaning “to bind back.” So, religion entails our binding ourselves back to God by giving Him what is His due: Our worship of Him. From here, we see that religion is a part of justice, and this corresponds to what we have seen above: “It is truly right and just.”

Second, thanksgiving to God is necessary for our salvation. Giving sacrifice to God in thanksgiving is an expression of love and devotion in response to God’s giving everything to us, including our very existence. Love cannot operate in only one direction; rather, it must involve both giving and receiving between the lover and the beloved. We can only be saved from sin and death by being in a relationship of true love with God, our Savior.

The ultimate expression of this sacrificial thanksgiving to God is, of course, the Eucharist (which means “thanksgiving” in Greek). Moreover, each person at Mass has the privilege and duty to unite their own personal sacrifices in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This is expressed powerfully by the prayer, “Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice *and yours* may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father (emphasis mine).” From here, we see that each and every person who is worshipping at Mass is to offer themselves as a sacrifice to God in union with Christ’s Sacrifice to the Father, the Holy Sacrifice of Calvary made present at Mass. What a beautiful opportunity and privilege it is to offer all your sufferings, prayers, and even your very selves in union with Christ’s Sacrifice at Mass as an act of thanksgiving! This is the ultimate way that you can follow the age-old advice to “offer it up” whenever you feel the weight of your own personal cross.

Obviously, we have only begun to scratch the surface of the mystery of offering thanksgiving to God as both right and just, our duty and our salvation. It is my hope that you can take these brief reflections to prayer and allow God to bring new and wonderful graces to you through your giving thanks to God at Mass and in your daily life..