

Once upon a time there was a man who lived in a small town in a small, one-room house with his wife, their eight children and his mother-in-law. And the man was slowly going mad with all the noise and the confusion, and so he set out one day, at the end of his rope, to seek out the village wise woman. "You've got to help me," he pleaded with her. "I'll do anything!" "Fine," she said, "but you must promise to follow my instructions to the letter." And so he promised. "Do you keep chickens?" the wise woman asked the man. "Yes," he said, perplexed, "we have six chickens." "Wonderful," said the wise woman. "Bring them into your house to live with you and your family for the next week. Then come back and see me." The man was confused about this, but he'd promised, so he went home and did as the wise woman had said. The week went by. The man found the stench of the chickens unbelievable, and the children kept getting into bed and breaking the eggs that had been left there. But the man went back to the wise woman and complained to her of all that had gone on. When he was finished, and looked at her expectantly, she smiled gently and asked, "Do you keep goats?" Then man looked wary. "Yes," he replied, "two of them." "Take them into your house to live with your family and the chickens for the next week," said the wise woman. "What!" exclaimed the man. "Come now," she said, "you promised you'd follow my instructions, didn't you? Then come back to see me at the end of the week." The next week the man was back. "That was awful!" he said. The chickens and the goats went on everything, the chickens are still laying their eggs everywhere, although half of them aren't laying at all anymore because they're so spooked, and the goats have chewed holes in half our blankets and in my wife's best tablecloth, which was given to her by her mother, so they're both furious with me, and...." His voice trailed off as he saw the wise woman's smile. "Do you have any cows?" she asked gently. The man looked at her, utterly speechless, but nodded and held up two fingers. "Wonderful," she said. "Take them into the house, to live with you and the chickens and the goats. And come back to see me in a week." The man left the wise woman's house, and took the cows into his home. They lasted for about two and a half days before the man kicked out the cows, the chickens and the goats, cleaned up the small house and sat down in front of the fireplace. He looked around at his large family, now seemingly blessedly quiet, and gave thanks for how blessed he truly was. And the wise woman smiled.

In 1952, the parliament of Canada passed a motion declaring the second Monday in October to be Thanksgiving Day, a day according to the Act that would be set aside to give thanks to Almighty God for all the abundant blessings we enjoy in this land. And so we are here, where every week we engage in Eucharist, the Greek word for thanksgiving, to celebrate thanksgiving with the rest of our nation by taking some time to really number our blessings and to give thanks.

Someone once said to me that they didn't understand why we need Thanksgiving; shouldn't we, all of us, always and everywhere give thanks to God for all that we have been given? Yes, of course we should. But do we? It seems that we need the reminder.

Just as we celebrate wedding anniversaries to remind us of the love two people share in a special way; just as we celebrate Easter to remind us each year of the amazing victory of God's love over the powers of death and despair, Thanksgiving is an opportunity to take a step back, to reflect on all that we have been given by God, and to say thank you. Like the leper who came back to kneel at Jesus's feet, we are called by this feast day to take the time to be grateful.

We take so much for granted in our lives. Only when we've undergone the tests and received the news that there is no cancer do we really know how to give thanks for our health. Only when we see the anguish of another family who has lost a child, or a friend who has lost a parent, do we really know how to give thanks for our loved ones. Only when we have been out of work for a time do we really know how to give thanks for meaningful work. Only when we have volunteered to sort food at the food bank do we understand the blessings we have in our relatively full kitchen cupboards.

And yet we live in a culture of whiners and complainers, people who will never have enough, no matter how much they have, and who spend so much time and energy complaining about it that I doubt they ever truly give thanks for what they have. A survey was done in the U.S. ten years ago. Pollsters spoke with folks earning less than \$15,000 and asked them if they thought they had achieved the American dream. 95% said no. Then they turned to those who earned more than \$50,000 and who owned their own home, and asked them if they thought they had achieved the American dream; 96% of them said no. Whether it's a case of the more we have, the more we want, or whether it's truly just a matter of taking what we do have for granted, I do not know. But I do know that those who live lives of gratitude for the gifts they do have are happier, less driven to get more, and I suspect, more able to focus on the things in life that really do matter.

And besides all that, God calls to us and asks us to be grateful. Much like the parent of a young child who, upon giving the child a cookie has to prompt, "What do you say?" before hearing the ritualistic "Thank you." God has given us so much, and then turns to us and prompts, "What do you say?"

Yet so many forces in our culture would have us respond not with, "thank you," but with "I earned this myself."

I worked hard, I got a good education, I threw myself into my work, I spent much time and sweat to get what I have today, I went through so much pain to get here, I deserve to enjoy it. Horsefeathers, to use a more acceptable alternative to what I am at first tempted to respond. Yeah, you might have worked hard, but where the heck do you think all the things you have came from in the first place? Who gave you the brains to do well in school or in business? Who gave you the gifts and talents you have that

you've been able to use? And who the heck are you to claim that you deserve any of what you have today?

We are sinners, all of us. We all know that we fail to live up to the standards God has set for us, we are all fallen, we all find ourselves in broken relationships with those around us. We hurt others, we say stupid things we wish we could take back, we don't love as fully as we might, and we harbour hatreds and grudges and resentments built up over the years. And yet, despite our undeservingness, God gives us so very much. We have to be thankful. We have to make a point of being grateful, because if we start to believe that it was in our own strength that we did these things, we fall into the trap of believing that we no longer need God; and then, what will become of us?

And when we do make a point of living lives in gratitude, of giving thanks for all that we have, the way we live our lives is changed. Because if I did nothing to deserve the blessings of my life, then I am no more entitled to enjoy them than another who may have worked just as hard but who simply hasn't had the breaks. I am sure that somewhere in the Sudan, say, there is a woman my age who has a child or children, who is starving to death, who has watched her husband die of AIDS and her baby die of hunger, and I cannot for a second believe that she has done anything to deserve that fate, any more than I have done something to deserve mine.

That being the case, being thankful, to me, means living a life that is as generous to others as God has been generous to us. We cannot truly believe, as we sing week by week when our offerings are presented, that all things come from God, without living that out. And I believe that living that out means living our lives knowing that our treasure, our talents and our time were given to us to use for the sake of God's kingdom of justice and peace, and not for us to hoard and enjoy for ourselves alone.

You and I follow a God who came to earth to become one of us, who died a cruel death for us before rising to new life, also for us. We follow a God who created us and put us in this time and this place, and gifted us with so very much. Today, as with every day of our lives, let us truly give thanks, not taking our gifts for granted, not thinking that we ourselves have earned them, but knowing that all comes from the gracious bounty of God. Amen.