



**Archbishop's Thanksgiving message:
Listen to Apostle Paul's call to return God's love for us**

In recent years we've been treated over and over again to certain truisms, such as "Real estate is location, location, location." Another is, "All politics is local." That latter statement is true not only of politics. In a real sense, all thanksgiving is local. All gratitude is local. Yes, all of us are thankful for blue sky, deep clear lakes, flowers in a myriad of colors, fall leaves turning, the oceans sparkling, mountains looming in black and green and white. But we are most thankful for this sky, this lake, these flowers and leaves, this ocean.

The first Americans to celebrate Thanksgiving more than 385 years ago gave thanks to God for the gift of freedom in their new land, and for their survival in that first year. Their gratitude was local as well. But their gratitude was not insular. They reached out to the natives of that place, and there was God-given diversity at that first Thanksgiving feast.

In our own century, and certainly for the last 40 years, "local" gratitude to God has had a new meaning, ever since we human beings first glimpsed our blue and white globe from the vantage of the heavens, and realized that the concept "local" could apply to an entire planet, to all its oceans and continents and languages and peoples. Within the boundless pageant of the galaxies, our earth is "local" indeed.

We are grateful for all the gifts God has given, and certainly this land and its freedom and prosperity figure greatly in our thankfulness. With those first American thanks-givers, we know all of us owe our very existence, our lives, to our Creator God, and that all life comes from his loving care. We know the answer to the Apostle Paul's question in his First Letter to the Corinthians: "What do you have that you have not received?" "Nothing!"

We are most grateful of all, though, for the human gifts God has given us, the gifts he gives us in and through one another. We begin with the most familiar, the dearest gifts: parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, grandparents and grandchildren — grateful for one another, grateful to God for loving each of them, in part, through one another.

We are grateful also for God's gifts of artistry, imagination and creativity; his gifts of dedication, fidelity and perseverance; his gifts of strength, acumen and skill.

But gratitude is not gratuitous, Thankfulness has a cost. It is not free. There is a test which the truly thankful pass, and others do not. Think of crystal: if it is genuine, it rings. We may claim that a glass is as lovely as crystal, that it shines like crystal, but if it doesn't "ring true," it is ordinary glass. That is true of thankfulness. The only "true ring" of gratitude is . . . generosity. We are grateful if we give, if we share what we have been given. "Giving back" to God in gratitude by giving generously does not mean slavish reciprocation, a \$10 item for a \$10 item. Our gratitude to others for their gifts of themselves to us expresses itself in the gift of ourselves in return.

Don't take my word for it. Once again, listen to the Apostle Paul, in his Letter to the Colossians: "Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Over all these virtues put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect. Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness."

It is not sufficient, then, to recite a perfunctory "thanks" to God, for form's sake, and then get right on with a life centered in self. That's not merely insufficient, it is spiritually destructive, soul-destroying. God doesn't want our thank-you cards. He wants our very selves, surrendered to his transforming love. God is Love, and he wants us to love him back. We love him back most genuinely when we let him make of us what he wills, when we answer his call to be merciful, kind, humble, patient, forgiving agents of his will in our world. Happy Thanksgiving!

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