

Rev Rita Message Oct 10 2021

Gratitude. Giving thanks. Gratefulness. Sometimes it is easy and sometimes it is hard. And it is a basic human need that is fundamental to a spiritual life and is essential for our physical and emotional well-being.

John Henry Jowett, a British preacher, of an earlier generation, described gratitude as a vaccine, an antitoxin, and an antiseptic. What did he mean? He meant that gratitude, like a vaccine, can prevent the invasion of a disgruntled attitude. As an antitoxin prevents the disastrous effects of certain poisons and diseases, thanksgiving destroys the poison of faultfinding and grumbling. When trouble has smitten us, a spirit of thanksgiving is a soothing antiseptic.

Charles Dickens once told Americans that they were all mixed up. He suggested that instead of having one Thanksgiving Day each year they should have 364. Spend one day complaining and griping and then use the other 364 to thank God each day for the many blessings God has showered upon them.

The Bible speaks a great deal about thanksgiving. There are many verses that encourage, remind, and instruct us to give God thanks for the many blessings in our lives. Generations before the time of Jesus, the writers of the Psalms in the Bible often proclaimed: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, for God's steadfast love is from everlasting to everlasting. Let us come before God's presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto God with psalms"

In today's scripture reading, Paul writes from a prison cell and encourages a little church in Philippi to have thankful hearts. Paul knew that the next footsteps he heard might be those of the guards taking him away to his execution. Not an hour passed in that dank, cramped cell when he was free from the constant irritation and pain of chains cutting into his wrists and legs. Separated from friends, unjustly accused, brutally treated, if ever a person had something to complain about, it was this man. However, instead of complaints, his lips rang with words of praise and thanksgiving! At another time, when he was imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote, "Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:19-20, NIV).

Wow! Giving thanks for everything no matter the circumstances! Thanksgiving for the Apostle Paul was not a once-a-year celebration but a daily practice. Charles Dickens would have approved.

In ancient times, Cicero the Roman statesman and philosopher, once, admitted that "There is no quality I would rather have, and be thought to have, than gratitude. For it is not only the greatest virtue, but is the mother of all the rest." During the Middle Ages, Meister Eckhart who was a German theologian and mystic famously said, "If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, 'thank you,' that would suffice."

In her book *Grateful*, the contemporary theologian and writer Diana Butler Bass says that: "Gratitude is not a form of passive acceptance or complicity. Rather, gratitude empowers us. It makes joy and love possible. It rearranges the way we see and experience what is all around us. Gratitude makes all things new. It transforms how we understand what is broken and give us the ability to act more joyfully and with hope. That is why gratitude is central to all the world's religions. Gratitude amplifies the good; balances out the not-so-good; and gives our lives more meaning, purpose and pleasure."

Thanksgiving is a time of gratitude to God, our Creator and Provider, whose guidance and care go before us and whose love is with us forever. Thanksgiving is a time to reflect on the changes, to remember that we, too, grow and change from one season of life to another.

Let us remember the true meaning of Thanksgiving. As we see the beauty of Autumn, let us acknowledge the many blessings which are ours. Let us think of our families and friends and let us give thanks in our hearts.

Thanks be to God. Amen.