

The Thread of Gratitude

Paul keeps thanking God.

Gratitude is a second-stage virtue. We do not usually intend to be grateful the way we intend to be brave or generous. Instead, we rejoice in finding a parking space — and then give thanks. Gratitude is an echo of joy, a response to goodness.



In a sense, gratitude is an automatic reaction, a spontaneous response to an undeserved kindness. But if that is so, then why are we not grateful all the time?

There are many reasons for our ingratitude. One is that we may not want the offered gift. Who would want that smashed worm eagerly offered by a 2-year-old? But then, what meanness of heart not to make a show of gratitude for that innocent intention.

We may not be grateful because gifts make us indebted to the giver. An older generation would respond, "Much obliged." Many of us now simply don't want to be beholden to anyone. We would rather do without than owe.

We may not be grateful because every gift is a connection between the giver and the receiver. That is why different gifts are appropriate to different relationships; an engagement ring commits one to a marriage relationship, for example, but we do not give personal gifts to mere acquaintances. Every gift, every offer, every kindness, every attention is a large or small connective thread to another person. An act of gratitude is an acceptance of that connection, an affirmation of that relationship, as intimate or distant as it may be — from a friendly smile to intimate sex. People offer themselves with their gift, and we respond or not.

We may not be grateful because we think someone owes us. After all, a gift is something unearned. But if we are entitled, then there is no call to be grateful. We need not be grateful for a paycheck or a diploma or a car; we earned them. They are due to us.

That is why gratitude is so difficult for modern Americans. The average American sees him or herself as a completely autonomous individual. She sees herself as entitled to good health, a nice job, a happy family, a rich and powerful nation to maintain and defend her entitlements.

The average American believes that he can take care of himself, is not in need of charity, can choose or reject any relationship that is or is not useful. If you are self-made and self-contained, what is there to be grateful for? And to whom?

That is a caricature, of course. No one is truly autonomous. We get life from parents, jobs from industry, food and clothes from stores, happiness from

human experiences and love from someone else. We are far from in control. We cannot make it rain, contain a recession, stop a war or cure a cold. We are intricately connected to every part and person of the universe. The only question is whether we choose to acknowledge and affirm that relationship.

That is why being grateful is like believing in providence. God makes all things happen. The sun rises, the season change, the market goes up, your ship comes in. All that would probably have happened without your thinking of God. But why live in a mechanical, matter-of-fact world when you can believe that God is right there in the middle of everything that happens? How different life feels if you believe that God is showering you with all these gifts as a personal favor!



Sunday, October 12, 2008 Your Gifts to God and Community

Sunday Collection
\$240.00

Cyrus the Persian says:
"Be sure to bring Abraham
to Church next Sunday!!!"



Safe Environment Training

St. Anne's in Edenton, NC will host a training on Saturday, October 25th from 1-4 PM in their church hall. If you have any questions please contact Wendy Callahan <rubies61@yahoo.com>

World Mission Sunday

This Sunday is designated by the U.S. Bishops as **Mission Sunday**. Paul's words in our second reading



encourage all of us to be missionaries, and the psalm calls us to **"tell his glory among the nations"** and **"among all peoples."** Jesus teaches us to give to God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to

Caesar. Please be as generous as you can to this second collection to help our church continue her mission to offer the Gospel to all peoples everywhere so that all may praise the Lord.

Calendar of Events This Week

- October 19th **Mission Sunday** 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Sunday Mass at 8:30 AM. Religious Formation follows the Eucharist at Parish House.

- October 20th Weekday Mass Parish House 8:30 am.
RCIA at Parish House 10 a.m. What do Catholics Believe?

- October 21st Good Shepherd Food Pantry Meeting at WUMC at 7:00 PM.

- October 22nd Bertie County Correctional Institute morning Mass 9:00 am.
St. Joan of Arc PPC meeting 6:00 pm.

- October 23rd Weekday Mass at Parish House 8:30 a.m.
Good Shepherd Food Pantry Drop at IGA at 5:00 p.m. in Windsor, NC

- October 24th Glenmary District Meeting 6 p.m. at St. Joan of Arc Plymouth, NC

- October 25th Safe Environment Training St. Anne's Catholic Church, Edenton, NC., Saturday from 1-4 pm.

Prayer Meeting and Gathering Saturday Evening — Romero's Home — beginning at 5:00 pm.

- October 26th 30th Sunday In Ordinary Time. Sunday Mass at 8:30 a.m. Religious Formation follows Eucharist at the Parish House.

- October 27th **RCIA at Parish House 10:00 am. What is the Meaning of the Mass?**

Post Cards to Death Row Inmates

People in the prison system are the most forgotten people. I invite you to write one of the following a postcard to let them know we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families.

James Morgan #0291861
David Gainesy #0139378
Billy Anderson #0007328

— Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC
27606

Piety and Politics

Ancient Israel was conceived as a theocratic nation, centered on God and devoted to a relationship with God that permeated every aspect of its existence. Witnesses throughout the Hebrew scriptures attest to the belief that Israel traced its origins to the call of God and understood that all subsequent events in its long history could be interpreted as turning on their responsiveness to that call.

For that reason, it followed logically that the Israelites regarded the conquest of Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem and the resulting exile not merely as a political calamity but as the consequence of piety that God had found wanting. It followed also that the people in exile were led to see the hand of God at work in Cyrus' rise to power, in his triumph over Babylonia and in his policy of allowing the exiles in Babylon to return to their homelands. In the reading from Isaiah the prophet shares this theocentric politics with his contemporaries by calling Cyrus who was a non-Jew and a pagan, God's **"anointed."** Like his fellow Jews, the prophet believed that God was so invested in Israel's history as to be able to direct any person or event that would best move forward the divine plan of salvation.



Unlike ancient Israel, contemporary nations adhere to a policy that deliberately distinguishes piety from politics. Contemporary believers tend to think of God and the things of God as extraneous to the workings of government. Most of us adhere to the political and legal doctrine

known as "the separation of church and state," a phrase first used by Thomas Jefferson in an 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists. Even though a nation pledges to Jefferson in an 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists. Even though a nation pledges to exist "under God," great effort is made to foster the dichotomy between religion and politics so as to preserve the freedom and independence of each.

Despite these efforts, believers do not live their lives dichotomously. Rather, authentic faith demands to be brought along so it can speak its redeeming grace to every venue of the human condition. As people of faith, we cannot leave our beliefs at the door, on the contrary, these beliefs will enable us to make better decisions in political matters as well as in religious spheres.

With great enthusiasm, our liturgy today encourages believers to **"Shine like lights in the world as you hold onto the word of life."** In other words, bring our piety into the world; let the truth of God's word inform every human arena, including that of politics. This Jesus did, and this was the challenge he set before his disciples. When he was confronted on the issue of the lawfulness of paying taxes to secular authorities, Jesus responded wisely. Rather than set himself over and against empire, or separate himself completely from any sector of humankind in need of his redemptive power, Jesus acknowledged the existence of empire and encouraged good citizenship.

Give to Caesar the tribute that is Caesar's, Jesus advised. Give to God what is God's These words of Jesus strike the balance between piety and politics. It is as if Jesus were saying: "Bring your best self, including your faith, prayerfulness and spirituality, with you wherever you go and make that place and the people you encounter there all the better for having known you.

