

November 26, 2025
Thanksgiving Eve, Year C
Trinity, St. Louis
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, Rector

Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Psalms 100
Philippians 4:4-9
John 6:25-35

In the Name of the Source of all abundance,
the Holy and Undivided Trinity. Amen.

I want to begin this evening with the first and the last lines of a poem by George Herbert, the 17th century poet, orator and priest. The poem is called *Gratefulnesse*.

“Thou that hast given so much to me,
Give one thing more, a grateful heart.

Not thankful, when it pleaseth me;
As if thy blessings had spare days:
But such a heart, whose pulse may be
Thy praise.”

There is a story we tell ourselves in this country. It is a story of the self-made person; someone who, out of nothing, is able to become successful, or rich, or famous – all by dint of their own gumption and sheer hard work.

Do you know this story? It shapes our identities, both as individuals and as a nation. The problem with this story is that it's not true. There is no such thing as a self-made person.

Today's reading from Deuteronomy reminds us that everything we have is a gift from God. That is the lesson the Israelites learned when they were wandering in the wilderness. They had to learn day in and day out that it was God who provided manna and quail from heaven; God who provided water from the rock.

And here they are, standing on the threshold of the promised land where there would be steady sources of water, and they would be able to till the land and eat and accumulate wealth. And God is concerned that when they enter the promised land, they would forget those lessons from the wilderness, that everything is a gift from God. That there are no self-made people.

When we begin to recognize the truth that we are dependent on God and each other, we can begin to live a life of gratitude, of thanksgiving, not just on Sunday or

holidays, or when we score a parking place, but as an intentional spiritual practice. Or, in the words of Herbert

Not thankful, when it pleaseth me;
As if thy blessings had spare days:
But such a heart, whose pulse may be
Thy praise.

G.K. Chesterton, a great writer of the early twentieth century, and creator of the famous priest-detective Father Brown, once said, “You say grace before meals. Alright, but I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and the pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing, grace before I dip the pen into ink.” Chesterton was a brilliant writer, who could easily have imagined that he was a self-made man, that his writing was his own skilled achievement. And yet he had the humility to recognize that it was a gift from God, and something for which he should give thanks.

One of the lessons that life has conspired to teach me (and I’ll admit to being an unwilling student) is that practicing gratitude makes one gracious. The more you see and receive the giftedness that surrounds you, the more likely you are to extend grace, and graciousness, to others.

I invite you to look at your hands for a moment. If you live within the story that you are self-made, not dependent upon others, that what you have is yours – my guess is that your hands tend to be closed. I mean, it’s important to hold on to what’s yours, isn’t it?

But if you live within the story that you are part of a community, maybe many communities, that you rely upon others, that what you have comes as gift – my guess is that your hands tend to be open.

Gratitude begets generosity. The more you say, “thank you” the more you can say, “here you go.” It really is that simple. Yesterday, some of us were able to see this lived out in spades at Old Bonhomme School. You can read about it in today’s eTimes.

Tonight, I want to tell you another story of gratitude and graciousness. Many years ago, on a November Saturday in Connecticut, I had the joy of participating in the monthly Family Service at an affluent parish near to mine. An integral part of that gathering was a service project whose aim was to connect the Eucharist to the life we live in the wider world. It being November, the children were decorating pie boxes that would carry freshly baked pumpkin pies in the town’s Thanksgiving baskets.

Just picture long tables, brimming with every crafting item imaginable – markers, stickers, leaves, glue and, of course, glitter. Each child brought their own

talents to bear, resulting in a cornucopia of dazzling decoration. Most of the young folks spent their time on the top and outside of the box, some the inside cover. But one little girl was laboring over inscribing a message on the bottom of the box. I said, "you know that when we put the pie in the box, no one will see this message." But she, the wisest theologian in the room that day, looked me square in the eye and said, "but when they take the pie out, they'll get surprise!" Wise, indeed! ... Oh, the message? "You are loved!" That young girl was already living within a story of open-handed gratitude and generosity.

Not a bad model for us, I think – to open the eyes of our hearts to see God's gracious hands in everything around us, and to open our hearts and hands to our neighbors whom we are commanded to love with thanksgiving because they are beloved children of God, just like us.

Let us pray,

"Thou that hast given so much to me,
Give one thing more, a grateful heart.

Not thankful, when it pleaseth me;
As if thy blessings had spare days:
But such a heart, whose pulse may be
Thy praise." Amen.