

Thanksgiving 2020 How to be Thankful this Year?

Fr. Frank Schuster

There was an article on CNN recently entitled “This Thanksgiving, you have permission to not be thankful”. 2020 has been an awful year compared to most and so, in the author’s estimation, simply being honest with how we feel this year is healthier. The point being, forced gratitude is dishonest and not constructive. And, I agree with the author’s point that forced gratitude isn’t helpful. In fact, I would argue that gratitude by definition cannot be forced given that the very word finds its roots in the word gratis, meaning “free”.

And so, forced gratitude is illogical and not helpful on Thanksgiving. However, I also think finding a reason or two to be grateful is a lot healthier than brooding right now. Admittedly, finding gratitude might not be easy unless we allow Jesus to help us here. I think this is what St. Paul is getting at in the second reading we chose for today, “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.” You see, St. Paul isn’t advocating “forced” gratitude or a naïve Polly Anna approach to gratitude either. He does, however, say that we should be grateful to almighty God in all circumstances. This is only possible with a relationship with Jesus Christ. If we allow Jesus into our heart this holiday, we can perhaps begin to truly appreciate all the things we took for granted before the pandemic and why we should be grateful for them today.

My friends, so many of us will have a smaller Thanksgiving dinner this year and there are many of us, myself included, who will be eating alone tonight. I think the CNN article giving people like me permission to not be thankful is about the worst piece of advice I can possibly think of. Sorry CNN, I am planning on having a good evening tonight because I am thankful to almighty God for all the blessings he has given me. I don’t need to be sitting at a dinner able to be grateful for my family who I can still be connected with over the phone and computer.

Gratitude cannot be forced. It is, however, sometimes a choice...and a far better choice than ingratitude in my book or feeling sorry for ourselves. As we see in our Gospel reading, Jesus healed ten lepers and only one came back to give thanks. Not a single one of them was forced to return to Jesus and give thanks, but the leper who did return was much better off for it.

And so, on this Thanksgiving, we might consider making a list of what we are truly and honestly grateful for to almighty God. If there are people on that list, we might consider calling them tonight which will remind them that they are on that list. If you don’t think they know why you are grateful for them, take a risk and tell them. I suspect if we all did this, something strange might happen tonight that CNN didn’t expect. We might be surprised that Thanksgiving was good after all.