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2012

After Thanksgiving

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Roche, Fr. Randy, "After Thanksgiving" (2012). *Spiritual Essays*. 274.

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After Thanksgiving

When we have given thanks to someone for a gift, a favor or a kind word, are we really done? The moment passes and we move on, but the effects of giving thanks remain with us, and quite probably with whomever we thank. Rather than being through, we are in the midst of becoming more habitually grateful persons. Giving thanks is a free act and a deeply human response to a very important aspect of life: caring for one another, and participating in God's care for us.

We become persons of gratitude, one "thank you" at a time. No matter how we convey our thanks, whether by words or gestures, a look or a touch, the deed is as good for us as it is for the recipients. Though we might have been taught that it is only "good manners" to give thanks to people for anything that they might do on our behalf, we are sincere when we express thanks even at those times when we do not feel particularly grateful. No matter what our state of feelings might be, when we give thanks we are taking part in building a community of respect and love.

Thanksgiving Day, as marked on our calendars, presents us with a reminder of the importance of giving thanks, especially in community settings of family, friends and associates. But giving thanks to one another and to God is best done every day of the year. The advantage of having a day singled out for Thanksgiving is that we all are reminded at the same time, encouraging communal participation by all those who are aware of the annual holiday celebration. Though we do not need a calendar as a prompt for giving thanks on a daily basis, we can help ourselves develop a strong habit of thankfulness by setting a time, and perhaps a usual place, when we pause and consider some of the most recent causes for gratitude that come to mind.

Who of us does not like receiving and giving thanks when there is a cause? If we reflect on every-day realities, such as creation that surrounds us and some of the conscious choices we have made, there are many, many possibilities for thankfulness. All kinds of favors abound in ordinary life: people we know, the benefits of human civilization, natural and man-made objects that are useful to us, and many other realities that we can acknowledge as gifts and benefits.

Giving thanks to God and to people can be a joyful exercise that fulfills a human need in us and a concomitant power for good that can be satisfied with relative ease. What does it cost to give thanks? Not a bit; and we all benefit from doing so.

We can even change some difficult or conflicted situations by consciously and creatively seeking in them some honest causes for giving thanks. We can at least try to transform our own suffering from merely enduring pain to that of realistic acceptance of what we cannot immediately heal or resolve. Seeking to place our troubled circumstances within a larger framework that includes our purpose in life permits an interior state of peace and even joy. Prayer certainly helps, for nothing can of itself separate us from love, the deepest source of gratitude.

After Thanksgiving, we can keep on giving thanks.