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Giving Thanks

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Giving Thanks

Since the words above indicate an interaction, not just a passive sentiment or a private sense of gratitude, other persons are involved. The question is: to whom shall we give thanks? Giving thanks requires that we first have appreciation for some benefits or gifts received and then decide to express our gratitude by thanking those who are responsible for the gifts.

If a family member or a friend cooks a meal for us, we can reflect on his or her care and kindness, and give thanks to that person. In addition, we are also able to consider the ultimate source of all that is beneficial to us, and thank God. We do not have to give thanks, but giving thanks is a precious gift we can give that costs nothing. All true expressions of gratitude are a form of love, the most significant contribution we can make in the world.

Who gains when we give thanks? The one who cooks for us or anyone who provides us with a service of any kind is hopefully pleased and encouraged by receiving our expressions of gratitude. But we who receive the benefit of someone else's work and his or her implicit or explicit care for our well-being, we too benefit from opening our hearts to the experience of gratitude and the activity of giving thanks. We enjoy receiving, and we also take pleasure in giving. This is how we are made.

When we anticipate having food, clothing, shelter, meaningful work and many other things, just because they are normally available or present for us, we certainly are nourished, clothed, housed, and also the recipients of a large number of daily necessities and non-necessities as well. But we will experience much more joy, pleasure, and depth of humanity in our lives when we acknowledge the human and divine providers of all that we have, and give thanks to them.

We give thanks for material things that people give or provide. We also express gratitude for kind words, meaningful presence, respect, encouragement, understanding, compassion, as well as for quality teaching and helpful guidance, including occasional caring confrontation. When we look for gifts received, in their myriad forms, we find more opportunities for giving thanks than we would seem to have the time or capacity to express. For this reason, many of us find that taking a little time in the evening to make a brief reflection about the day's gifts, and to thank God for them, is a heart-lightening experience. We might also, at such a time, decide to express thanks

by note, voice message, or personal meeting to some of those persons whose deeds or words particularly come to mind as we look back through the previous events of the day.

By reflecting on both the commonplace and the extraordinary gifts of God and of many people, present and past, we can easily find within ourselves beautiful gifts that we can give to them: our thanks.