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## Thank You

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## Thank You

I have had reason to send many "thank you" notes recently. As with writing Christmas cards, the task itself is not appealing, but sending them brings much satisfaction. Giving thanks is one of the finest characteristics of being a human. I am sure that our family dog was grateful for treats, as indicated by a furiously wagging tail. But we humans can, if we choose, give thanks even for things that are not necessarily pleasurable. To say "Thank you" to someone who shares in a moment of grief or loss is as lovely a human quality as expressing gratitude for a delicious meal, a carefully wrapped present, or any gift that we might give to one another.

We have been taught, as children, that we have a responsibility to thank people for gifts, and also to thank people for services rendered, even if we pay for the transactions. We become human by acting as humans: gratitude defines us as much as being able to think and to walk on two feet. Once we learn to give thanks, we experience a fine aspect of our spirituality in the responses we make for all that we receive. Giving thanks enhances us as much as it blesses others.

We do not give thanks to ourselves; we only thank other persons. We are created for relationships, not for isolated individual perfection, fulfillment, or any other option that we could imagine. What good is a talent or an achievement, except as it can be shared with, or expressed to, others? Whatever we do, the person we become and convey through our thoughts, actions, verbal and non-verbal expressions, provides others with occasions for giving thanks, just as an actor or musician, a grandmother or brother, a friend or a waiter, supplies us with reasons for gratitude.

In addition to people we meet in the course of our days, we might also want to say "Thank you" to God, Jesus, or a Holy One who is with God. Perhaps someone might believe that "Thank you" is over-familiar or is inadequate to convey our intentions. But our expressions of gratitude reflect our relationships with others, including God. God, and all who are with God, know us completely, and love us much more than we can know or love them. Any familiarity we have with one another is very slight compared to God's close and particular regard for each of us. The more we convey our gratitude to God, to Jesus, or to those who are already with God, the more likely we will find ourselves using whatever expressions are natural for us, perhaps including "Thank you."

God does not need our thanks, nor do the people we encounter each day. Whoever freely gives us a gift does not require gratitude as a prerequisite for caring about us, and those who provide services for pay do not demand thanks as part of the interchange. When we give thanks, we display a human quality that adds positively to every relationship, from least to greatest: our respect, at a minimum, and more probably, our love. When we contribute even a small amount to any relationship, we often receive even more in return – both from those we have thanked and also by becoming more truly human. Though people do not always respond to our gratitude, God does. God initiates the cycle by supplying both the gifts we receive and the inspirations to recognize them. Giving thanks is one way of loving back. And God, who is love, will keep the cycle moving forward to ever deeper levels.

“Thank you” can be both courteous and profound.