

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

The world has *Thanksgiving* all wrong – even though it is a “national” holiday that has spread even beyond our borders. But we should expect that. The world – upside-down, backwards, and corrupted as it is by sin – takes that which is good ... twists it ... and guts it of its real meaning ... always taking God out of its way. Without God there is no one to really give thanks to ... unless it is merely ourselves. That’s more than a little narcissistic. And if we gives thanks to each other ... well, that’s only slightly less self-centered; it is still man-centered ... and leaves God out of things.

I saw something this morning that I had only heard about previously – the presidential pardoning of a turkey. It occurs to me that this epitomizes the worldly handling of things God does and gives for our good. It makes a mockery out of even the secular, presidential power of pardoning. And even the secular power is but a distorted – not to mention, often only politically motivated – version of what true pardon is all about. And the speech that went along with this nonsensical yearly event was also sadly devoid of the true reason for *Thanksgiving* ... the true Source of all for which we can and ought give thanks – God.

Thanksgiving – like faith – rightly has an object. To simply say, “I give thanks” begs for an object. **For what** do I give thanks?!? And more importantly **to whom** do I give thanks?!? (The “w” should be capitalized there, shouldn’t it?) To Whom! Namely, to God!

Only one of the lepers returned to give thanks to God ... to Jesus, the eternal Word enfleshed. 9 out of 10 failed to return. I am quite sure they were very happy about the healing they received – generally “thankful” for it. But they did not thank the Source of their reason to be thankful. They did not thank the Lord Who had shown them mercy. The vast majority of the world is that way – and so are we. It is easy for us to give thanks when something big happens ... when we are spared a disaster that we recognize. We don’t always do it then – that’s in really poor form. But the Lord is merciful to us in countless ways day by day. We should thank the Lord for His mercy when we rise up, when we sit in the house, when we walk along the way, and when we lie down again at the end of the day.

It is often the case that we take the Lord’s blessings for granted. We

Christians are quite guilty of this sin of thanklessness – including all of us gathered here this evening. Now it might seem a little impractical, but the truth is that we should thank the Lord quite literally for every morsel of food we eat ... every drop of water we drink ... every breath we take ... every beat of our heart ... every blink of the eye. And that's just physical blessings for which to **begin** giving thanks to the Lord. We should even give thanks to the Lord when we are in tribulation and distress – not **for** those things precisely ... but **in spite of** them ... that God **sustains us** in the **midst** of such difficulties ... and sees us through them ... until He grants us a blessed release and rest.

So on this eve of a *National Day of Thanksgiving* we are gathered by the Holy Spirit in the place of God's gracious presence to give Him thanks and praise for all His benefits. And most of all we give thanks to the Lord for *The True Thanksgiving Feast* – which is what He has graciously and mercifully set before us this evening. I am talking about *The True Thanksgiving Feast* of His forgiveness, life, and salvation that He sets before us day after day ... and especially week after week in the *Divine Service* ... also this night.

With the leprosy of our sin still clinging to us – as it always does in this life – we come before Jesus, our Lord and Master, saying: *Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us.* And He does have mercy upon us. Having confessed our sins we hear **true** pardon – *in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* We have heard Christ's Holy Word, ***Go and show yourselves to the priests*** [Lk 17.14] – His Gospel-Word that comes with the Holy Spirit and with power to effect what its promises. Implied in Jesus' command is that they will be healed of their dread leprosy and that the priests will declare them once again clean – that they will be restored to family, friends, community, synagogue, fellowship. And the lepers, ***as they went ... were cleansed.***

So it is when **you** hear the Gospel-Word promising that your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. That gracious Word of your Almighty God works what it declares ... and **your** sins are truly forgiven – indeed, have been **already** by the Savior's merciful work on the Cross on **your** behalf. By the Blood of Christ **you** are cleansed from all the unrighteousness of your sins

and your sinfulness. Both the surface disfigurement of your sins and the deep-down cause of your sinning have been sprinkled clean by water and the Word so that you are no longer unclean in the sight of God – but rather holy, righteous, pure, and without stain **in Christ**.

And as we are gathered here this evening to give thanks, so we receive *The True Thanksgiving Feast* in that foretaste of the heavenly Wedding Banquet that is also referred to as the *Eucharist* – which comes from the Greek meaning *Thanksgiving*. Holy Communion is a Holy Thanksgiving. Have you ever noted the words that follow the distribution of the Body and Blood of our Lord in the liturgy? In the dismissal we virtually hear the words of our Savior spoken to that one leper who returned to give Him thanks: **Rise and go your way; your faith** – your God-given faith – **has saved you** [LK 17.19]. Or, as we hear it quite simply: **Depart in peace**. In the much more recent *Divine Service* – recent in the 2000 year history of the Church – we sing the *Post-Communion Canticle* words: *Thank the Lord and sing His praise; tell everyone what He has done* – namely, that He has saved us and assured us that we are cleansed from our sins and all unrighteousness by the Body and Blood of our Savior. *Let everyone who seeks the Lord rejoice and proudly bear His Name. He recalls His promises and leads His people forth in joy with shouts of thanksgiving. Alleluia, alleluia.* And in the older liturgy that we are using this evening, drawing from PSALM 107 we hear and speak: **Oh, give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good, and His mercy endureth forever.** [107.1] That Psalm goes on to say in verse 2: **Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy.** And later [107.31-32] the Psalmist exclaims: **Let them thank the LORD for His steadfast love, for His works to the children of man! Let them extol Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the elders.** So it is, then, that we pray: *We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another.*

The lepers – and we with them – cry out: **Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.** Here in the place – in *The True Thanksgiving Feast* of His forgiveness, life, and salvation – Jesus **does** have mercy on us. Thanks be to Christ ...

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]