

Gratitude: The Heart of Thanksgiving

In the United States, Thanksgiving Day is a holiday that is among the nation's finest national traditions. Indeed, setting a day aside for giving thanks to God is not just a U.S. phenomenon. Canadians have a Thanksgiving Day, and many countries worldwide celebrate harvest festivals that express gratitude to God.

For Christian stewards, Thanksgiving Day has special meaning, for we know that gratitude lies at the very heart of stewardship. A grateful heart heralds the beginning of discipleship and opens the way to our deepest response, the desire to return to God for the bounty of our lives. The French educator Jean Baptiste Massieu put it beautifully: "Gratitude is the memory of the heart." For what do we thank our Creator? The early American colonists, who gave inspiration to the Thanksgiving Day tradition, were thankful for their very survival in a harsh and unforgiving environment. Many of their compatriots were buried in the soil of their new land, far from all that had been cherished and familiar.

It's natural to thank God when things seem to turn out the way we had hoped, when disaster is averted, when life seems filled with abundance. Harder, perhaps, is the ability to thank God for being present to us in times of struggle, seeming failure, illness and death. But, in the heart of the Christian steward, the memory of God's presence is a comfort and a gift all its own.

If we take time to reflect on our lives, we often discover that that for which we are most grateful was a gift which we struggled to receive. What came to us in the form of hardship has in hindsight revealed itself as gift. This is why each day's struggles and trials should be met with a heartfelt "thank you."

Meister Eckhart, the 14th century Dominican mystic, wrote, "If the only prayer you ever say is 'thank you,' that will suffice." At first, this seems puzzling. What of praise and petition? But Eckhart knew that the most genuine response, and indeed, the first and most spontaneous response of the heart which has discovered God, is "thank you." Gratitude lies at the beginning of true prayer. As we reflect on this time of thanksgiving, let us be present to those moments when God's gifts were hidden in shadow and remember to be thankful for all.

A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER *for Thanksgiving*

Heavenly Father,

We give you thanks for the inspiration of your Holy Spirit as we reflect on the Gospel call to exercise Christ's stewardship on our journey of faith.

We ask you to guide us in our discernment, and show us how to be faithful in the plans we make, the actions we take and the love we share on our pilgrim way. Give us the courage to find wisdom in our sacrifices, joy in our generosity, and hope in the compassion we show, especially to those most in need of your comfort and care.

And create in us a more open heart and a greater awareness of our need to grow, to change, to be transformed, so that we may be better stewards of your gifts for the good of all. Amen