

Thanksgiving

By Eyob Zewdu

Thanksgiving is a way of life

- As servants, this must be our way of life. The servant who does not live a life of thanksgiving reflects that life in whom he serves.
- Thanksgiving is a critical aspect of our spiritual life. Jesus tells us in the Bible to be thankful. Recall when Jesus cleansed the ten lepers in Luke 17:15-18. Only one of the ten returned to thank Jesus, and Jesus said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?”

Life of Thanksgiving

- The life of thanksgiving is not thanking God for a specific event, an occasion, or a gift, but rather it is a life of thanking God in all things and in all circumstances, always.
- “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20).

Thanksgiving

- We thank God for all things because everything that God does is good, and this is why we call God “beneficent” in the Thanksgiving Prayer.
- God does not do except good, and the person who believes this can truly understand Saint Paul’s words, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28).

Levels of Thanksgiving

Levels of Thanksgiving

- The lowest level of thanksgiving is giving thanks to God for miracles, gifts, pleasures, worldly success, riches, and easiness of life. Sometimes, however, we do not even thank God for these things.
- There is a higher level of thanksgiving. We should thank God for the little and simple things in life as well, such as life itself, recovery from a cold, good health, our Christian roots, etc... These things are apparent and visible but quite often taken for granted.

Levels of Thanksgiving

- The highest level of thanksgiving is to give thanks for our tribulations. We should thank God in the midst of difficult times and troubles, and to be content and thankful in times of tribulations.
- The saints and the apostles considered all such suffering a blessing that they did not deserve. We also read, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29).
- Saint Paul says in Philippians 4:6-7, “Have no anxiety about anything, but by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Virtues Related to Thanksgiving

The life of thanksgiving is deeply tied to many great Christian virtues,

Faith

- The person who lives a life of thanksgiving has strong faith. It is impossible to always give thanks to God without having strong faith. We have faith in God that He is the doer of all things, and lover of mankind for all things

Patience

- Man must be patient to see the work of God in their life, and only then can they live a life of thanksgiving. Jesus says, “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

Humility

- The humble person deeply feels the goodness of God and never feels he deserves what God has given him, and thus a life of thanksgiving is a natural response for the humble person. On the contrary, the proud person feels he deserves more than what he has and finds it very difficult to be thankful. An example of this is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14).

Contentment

- The thankful person is always content in their life, living life with joy in their heart, never complaining or grumbling. Saint Paul said, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

Submission to God's Will

- The life of thanksgiving requires and results in a full and unconditional submission to God's will in our life. A good example of this is Jonah in the whale when he said, "But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving" (Jonah 3:9).

God-centeredness

- Very often, there are those who have worldly or materially objectives, and become sad if they are not reached, and cannot thank God amidst his adherence to these objectives. But the spiritual person has only one objective: God. Therefore, it does not worry him if the world prospered or elapsed. He takes no interest in its vanishing objects, and does not feel sorry for missing its pleasures. In his contentment with God, he feels great joy for which he gives thanks to God.

Reasons for Not Giving Thanks

We Do Not Know What Is Good For Us

- We may think we know what is good for us, but in reality it is not. God is the only person who knows what is good for us, and we must trust Him and have faith in this fact. Saint Mary and Joseph did not complain when the angel told them to take the Christ child to Egypt.

We Do Not Look Ahead

- When we are unthankful, we tend to be unthankful regarding our current state (or the past) and we are unable to look ahead and have faith that God is preparing something better for us. Looking ahead requires faith, and the person lacks faith.

We do not remember the good things God has done for us

- The unthankful person always forgets the good things of the past, and does not meditate on the good things that God has given them or how God brought them out of troubles or hard times of the past. The unthankful person can only focus on their current condition in which they are consumed.
- David the Psalmist says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord O my soul, and forget not all His benefits” (Psalm 103:1-2).

We remember our tribulations more than the good things we have

- The unthankful people always focuses on the negative, and only sees their hardships, whether in the present or in the past. Saint Paul tells us that we must not dwell on the negative past, as he says about his own life, “But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead” (Philippians 3:13).

Desire for worldly possessions

- Those whose goals are the things of this world: money, pleasure, power, prestige, and material possessions, can never be satisfied or live a life of thanksgiving. Once they lose any of their worldly possessions, even temporarily, they become distraught and bitter.

Insisting on our will rather than God's will

- The person who does not submit his life to God and insists on his will rather than God's, will always be disappointed in life and cannot be thankful.

We take too many things for granted

- We often do not give thanks because we take far too many things for granted like our health, food, clothing, money, work, etc... We feel that these are normal things to have in life in which there is no need to give thanks.

What to Thank God For

Thank God for the nature around us

- God created man on the sixth day after He created the nature to surround and comfort man.

Thank God for the talents He gives us

- Wisdom and knowledge were placed before healing and miracles (1 Corinthians 12:8-10).

Thank God for life

- We thank God for life in the Thanksgiving Prayer when we say “He brought us to this hour.”
- We should thank God for the time He gives us on earth to repent and to “lay up our treasure in heaven” (Matthew 6:20)

Thank God

- Thank God because He has protected, assisted, preserved, accepted us, had compassion on us, supported us and brought us till this hour - This is what the church teaches us in the Prayer of Thanksgiving of St. Basil.

Thank God for the good you see and the good you cannot see

- We thank him for the good we observe by sight, and the good we see by faith. God who calls us to do good in secret, and He sees what we do in secret, will reward us openly (Matthew 6:4-6).
- He also does many good things in secret for us in which we must thank Him openly. Many of the good things we now enjoy have been prepared for us by God many, many, years ago, and we did not know at the time that He was planning such things.

Thank God for the great redemption He offered to us

- There is something more important than all the previous things, for which we ought to give thanks all day and night. It is the great redemption offered to us on the cross, and without it, we all would have perished. No one could have been saved from the sentence of death without the incarnation of the Son, His crucifixion, His death, and His Resurrection.

Thank God for His promises to us

- We thank Him for the eternal comfort He is preparing for us in the heavenly Jerusalem. “The tabernacle of God with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people (Revelation 21:3). He promised us saying, … “I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). He also promised us with what “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him ” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Thank God because He called us His children and His friends

- St John the beloved said, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1). He taught us to pray and say, “Our Father in heaven...” (Matthew 6:9). Jesus also said, “No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends” (John 15:15).
- He called us His own, and it was said, “having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (John 13:1).

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