

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today is no festival in the church, even though there is white on the altar. Why are we here giving thanks on this day? We're not remembering a special day in the life of Jesus our Lord — His nativity, circumcision, baptism, presentation, transfiguration, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension.

Christians are a people who acknowledge the goodness of their Lord daily — as we do when we pray the Lord's Prayer. Luther explains: "We pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize [that God gives us our daily bread]" so that we may "receive our daily bread with thanksgiving" (Luther, Small Catechism, 4<sup>th</sup> Petition of Lord's Prayer). Thus, Christians are constantly giving thanks — certainly not just one day a year.

We are here in part this day because Christians are called to be good citizens, honoring those to whom honor is owed (Rom. 13:7). Our leaders have encouraged us to gather to give thanks, and we honor the request. In fact, Americans have, without fail, been encouraged to give thanks in November ever since Abraham Lincoln set aside the last Thursday in November as a National Day of Thanksgiving and encouraged us to "observe [it] as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens" (Lincoln, Thanksgiving Proclamation, 1863, [pilgrimhall.org](http://pilgrimhall.org)).

George Washington before Lincoln called us to "unite in rendering unto [God] our sincere and humble thanks," listing various things, including "the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed," sadly, some of which today are under assault. ([founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-04-02-0091](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-04-02-0091)).

And presidents since Lincoln have issued their own Thanksgiving Day proclamations, many with words similar to these by George W. Bush in November 2001: "I encourage Americans to assemble in their homes, places of worship, or community centers to reinforce ties of family and community, express our profound thanks for the many blessings we enjoy ..." (Bush, Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, 2001, [pilgrimhall.org](http://pilgrimhall.org)).

In the throes of the Civil War, Lincoln also called all Americans to a "humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience," to pray for those affected by "the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently [to] implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the divine purpose, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity, and union" (Lincoln, Thanksgiving Proclamation, 1863, [pilgrimhall.org](http://pilgrimhall.org)).

These words are timely for today also as many claim that our country is as divided now as it was at the time of the Civil War. That may be true. It's hard for me to measure. I do know that I was still pretty young in the tumultuous times of the 1960s, and those times seemed worse to me, even though, growing up on a farm, I wasn't much affected by them. Regardless, Lincoln's call not only to Thanksgiving but also to repentance and healing resonate with me again in these latter days.

Thus, we are here on this National Day of Thanksgiving in part because we have been encouraged to give thanks, but we are HERE in church not just because of the proclamation's encouragement to gather in "places of worship," but more so because we know the giver of "*every good gift and every perfect gift*" (James 1:17). For, you see, we are more than just thankful for "the many blessings" or for "the great and various favors which [God] hath been pleased to confer upon us." We are here to give thanks to the One who "*is good*" and whose "*steadfast love endures forever*" (Ps. 118:1).

In the reading from St. Luke, although neither Jesus nor Luke tells us, I'm quite sure that all ten lepers whom Jesus cleansed were happy at their good fortune — at that blessing. I would even render a guess that they were all full of thanks. But what Jesus does point out is that, for nine of them, theirs was a thanks that went unspoken; theirs was not a thanksgiving.

But the one did return to praise God, and he was commended for it as an act of faith. This distinguishes believers from unbelievers, for believers have someone to thank for all their benefits — the giver. The one recognized who the giver was — Jesus had cleansed him — and falling down prostrate before Jesus as an act of worship, he gave Jesus thanks.

Like this one Samaritan leper, we Christians do not need to be told to give thanks, not even encouraged. Praise and glory and thanksgiving are a part of our worship. They're part of who Christians are as people of faith who recognize the One who "richly and daily provides [us] with all that we need to support this body and life," and the One who "*has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 1:3). To be sure, we recognize our duty "to thank and praise, serve and obey" our God for His First Article gifts; but He is especially the One who "*forgives all [our] iniquity, who heals all [our] diseases, who redeems [our] life from the pit, who crowns [us] with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies [us] with good*" (Ps. 103:3-5).

Therefore, especially, we recognize the great privilege of coming into His holy presence, being cleansed by Christ our Lord in the forgiveness of our sins, and being given a faith that saves us. And so, our praise erupts naturally; our souls burst forth in blessing. Regardless whether we ourselves are abounding or brought low in First

Article things, we know that we are rich in Christ, and so, our thanksgiving to God flows forth in abundance, for Christ's saving work and the Spirit's sanctifying work are the greatest blessings we have received.

And so, here we are today doing our duty to God and country. But more so, we are here in joyous response of thanksgiving to our giving God. *"Bless the LORD, O my soul, all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits"* (Ps. 103:1-2).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.