

Although originally a harvest festival, over the years Thanksgiving has taken on a much broader meaning. For many, it is ordinarily an occasion for the scattered members of one's family to gather, to exchange stories, to celebrate one another's achievements and well being and to do so in the context of a special meal, a meal often marked by recipes and traditions handed down in the family. Unfortunately this year, much of that will be different.

No matter, however, what form Thanksgiving takes or what challenges we are confronting as we celebrate it, it is an occasion for us to take time to think about our life, our family, friends, work, about all the things by which in different ways we have been gifted and for which giving thanks ought to come naturally.

Being grateful can and should be for most of us something that is part of everyday life. To say "thank you," is for some people an all but spontaneous reaction to anything done for them, whether it is a small thing or something more significant. I am struck, for example, by the different reactions people have when someone holds open a door for them. Some say "thank you," others say nothing. It is almost as if those in the latter group somehow think that people ought to do things like that for them, that they are entitled to them.

Gratitude comes naturally for people who have any real sense of God and of our radical dependence on him. The belief that God has freely called the whole of created reality, including ourselves, into existence can't help but have an impact on the way we live and on the way we respond to the experience of gift in all dimensions of life including love and friendship, kindness and forgiveness, care and concern.

If we have no experience of gift, no perception that something has been freely given to, or done for, us, there can be no gratitude. To find oneself in that position, especially over a long period of time, can be tragic and painful. It is as if we have been cut off from a fundamental dimension of what it is to be human.

Giving thanks is at the heart of Christianity. It is rooted in faith in God's creative activity as well as in his reaching out to us in Christ. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God draws near to us and invites us into the most profound of relationships with himself. In that relationship, "everything is grace," everything is gift. In the light of Christ, even things that don't initially look like gifts, can come eventually to be understood as such.

The Eucharist draws together all the major threads of Christian faith and life. The word itself in its Greek root means "thanksgiving."

In the Scripture readings at Mass, we hear again and again of God's healing, renewing, and reconciling activity in and through Christ and in the power of the Spirit. Our commemoration of the Last Supper takes the form of a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, a prayer in which we remember God's many gifts, especially the gift of forgiveness and reconciliation in Jesus. "Lift up your hearts," the priest invites the gathered community: "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God."

As Canadians here and across the country come together in their families to celebrate Thanksgiving this weekend, we all have, as individuals, as members of families, and as citizens of this country, many reasons, in spite of the pandemic, to be grateful. Some of those we all share, others are particular to individuals among us. The more grateful we are to God and to one another, the more will we be able to create a world of mutual respect and caring.

God, the Scriptures say, is the giver of every good gift. He is present in all that we do, including our expressions of gratitude. May our celebration of Thanksgiving this year motivate us to use the gifts of nature and of grace we have been given in ways that will serve the well-being of our families, our country and people everywhere.