

Thanksgiving is such an essential part of prayer. In fact, Meister Eckhart, a thirteenth-century German theologian, philosopher and mystic, wrote, “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.”

Today’s scriptures relate to the theme of thankfulness...

First Reading: **Malachi**. The prophet is chastising the People of God for their lack of appreciation and thankfulness for all that the Lord has done for them through the centuries. He delivered them from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. He chose them from all the nations to be His special people with whom He entered a covenant of love and faithfulness. He forgave them many times for their unfaithfulness when they broke the covenant and returned to the worshipping of false gods. The prophet announces that a day of reckoning was coming because they were not full of thanksgiving and gladly showed that gratitude by obeying the commandments.

St. Paul in his first letter to the **Thessalonians** expressed his gratitude for them: “And for this reason we too give thanks to God unceasingly, that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word, but, as it truly is, the Word of God, which is now at work in you who believe.” We give thanks unceasingly. That we might embrace such an attitude.

Prayer is the foundation of our lives as disciples of the Lord Jesus and as His good stewards. Yes, I am going to talk about stewardship over the next three weekends. Today, I am sharing about an attitude of gratitude as the foundation of our stewardship. Next week on participation and belonging and the week after that on generosity.

So, what exactly is stewardship? There is a tendency to reduce it to “contribute more money,” but that does not come close to capturing the scriptural richness of this concept.

I will define stewardship is this way:

1. It is recognizing that everything we have and are is a gift from God.
2. It is taking the time to be grateful for those gifts.
3. It is returning a portion of those gifts to God.

You can see that thankfulness is at the heart of stewardship. And time with God in prayer brings forth the fruit of thankfulness.

When I teach about prayer to the fifth grades at QOA, I use an acronym to help them remember the four ways we pray to God. PITA. P = Praise God for all His awesome qualities; I = I’m Sorry, God, for my sins. Please forgive me; T = Thanksgiving for His many gifts; and A = Asking. Of these four ways of praying, two of them, praise and thanksgiving, are very closely related and highlight God’s tremendous goodness and the many blessings in our lives. One humbly acknowledges our sinfulness and request for God’s forgiveness. These three clearly focus our attention on God.

Now, notice that asking God for things is listed last. Not because it is unimportant: Jesus does say. “Ask and you shall receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” But first three ways of praying put us a right relationship with God before we ask Him for things.

We really need to make time with God in prayer the highest priority every day. Matthew Kelly of Dynamic Catholic recommends that we start with at least 10 minutes of daily prayer. But whatever it is, to be faithful to it every day. Why?

By spending time with God every day:

1. We feel how deeply God loves us and how abundantly He has blessed us. We begin to see blessings that we did not know were blessings.
2. We recognize that God is ultimately in charge of our lives and we can give up our own strong control.
3. We can see more clearly how God is calling us to live our lives and share our gifts.
4. We establish a closer relationship with Jesus that allows us to place our lives into His Hands and to trust Him completely.
5. We are more able to make the kind of sacrifices that stewardship calls us to make, because we know that all we have and are gifts from God and belong to Him.

Taking the time for daily, faithful prayer generates a grateful heart. Here is a challenge for you and me. In the pews and in the bulletin, there is a blue sheet labeled, “Ten Reasons To Be Thankful.” The days of the week are listed with ten lines under each day. The challenge for you and me is to write down ten reasons for which we are thankful that day. That will not be too difficult, other than sticking to it every day. The more challenging part is not to repeat our reasons for being thankful! Now would that be a lesson in developing an attitude of gratitude as we see all the reasons to give thanks. Finally, recall that I said a great way to start our time of prayer is to spend a few moments giving thanks to God. If you usually take a bulletin home, the blue sheet is in the bulletin. Otherwise, take the one in the pew with you.

A parting thought. The parable in today’s gospel teaches the importance of humility. There is an essential link between humility and thanksgiving. A truly humble person knows that his or her gifts come from God and the natural response of the heart and soul is “Thanks, God!” as Fr. Pepe likes to say.

Stewardship – repeat the definition – begins with prayer. However, prayer is not the final goal. Prayer is not the end. Our prayer must lead us to action. Our faithful prayer will naturally lead us to participation/belonging and generosity. More to come.