

Greetings to you, dear sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ! May I [again] say, “A blessed and happy Day of Thanksgiving to you!” So we observe this Day of Thanksgiving in Worship this Sunday in October, in the year of our Lord, 2023.

We can look around where we are seated today, and isn't it fitting to add a word of thanks for those who decorated this sanctuary for today? We see signs and colours that remind us of bountiful harvest, don't we! And we can reflect on the blessings God has so abundantly showered on us.

Even more, we can admit, in our relative affluence as compared to many people across this world who are under duress of war, catastrophe and famine, that we are privileged to be anticipating special food once again, associated with this occasion. In fact, if you do not have plans already with family or friends, we invite you to join a special meal out together this afternoon, following worship. Indeed, we cannot deny that we are blessed. Now, are we also happy this Thanksgiving, as our greetings bid us to be?

This year, I chose the reading from 1 Timothy 2, the alternate from Philippians 4 for this Day of Thanksgiving celebration. It's rather short, and quite direct with the bidding to offer prayers of thanksgiving along with petitions of supplication. Let me read the opening two verses again now. St. Paul writes to his dear “child in the faith,” Timothy, yet now grown, and serving the Lord as an overseer of the church at Ephesus, and perhaps other churches further in the region:

¹First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

(1 Timothy 2:1-2, ESV)

The Message version reads: **The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation.**

So, are you ready to pray? Just where does this discipline come from? Where really does thanksgiving come from? Isn't giving thanks rather kind-of-just passed over by us in our self-absorbed culture these days?

Get past the basic “hi,” “no problem” and “perfect” we share in dealing with people, and we're a rather needy lot, wanting and desiring many things we don't yet have. Is this translated to the common idea of prayer? That it's a way for getting more of what we want and need? God Himself must have a pretty thankless job! Hearing billions of wishes and desires and wants all cast into the wind. And then there's the moans and groans category! What's it like on His end? To think of it, He's most often held “guilty” or incapable or not paying attention when people don't get what they are wishing and praying for--then add in the expectation of when they expect they need it. In fact, God must be dead, many conclude, when their prayers are not heard.

So, how can St. Paul urge us to pray?

Under the discussion of “Sanctification and Good Works, the Christian Life and Prayer,” Lutheran dogmatician Franz Pieper includes this statement, which becomes true when living faith is the basis: (Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III, p.77)

Prayer has been fittingly compared to the heartbeat of physical life: it never ceases. Luther says: “Where there is a Christian, there is the Holy Spirit, who is always engaged in prayer. For though the Christian does not continually move his lips to utter words, nevertheless, the heart is beating and pulsating, like the arteries and the heart in the body, unceasingly, sighing: O dear Father, may Thy name be hallowed, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done among us and all people, etc. And as the attacks, trials, and troubles press and crowd harder, also such sighing and begging becomes more urgent, even audible. So, then, you cannot find a Christian who is not always praying, as little as a living person is without a pulse, which never rests, but beats continuously, though the person may be sleeping or is occupied otherwise, so that he is not aware of its beating.” (St. Louis VIII:363.) – *And Pieper concludes:* Dividing prayer into Thanksgiving and supplication fully covers the ground.

How does the Holy Spirit Luther mentioned get involved? He is at work through God's Word. And this brings forth the power of God at work in our lives. Truly, **“God's Word Excites Thanksgiving!”**

Let's listen more fully to today's text. Paul has exhorted prayers--supplications, intercessions, and thanksgivings – and urged prayer for kings and others in authority or rulership over us, that God's people may have the blessing of peaceful and quiet lives, a certain freedom under decency and order rather than chaos, that permits His Church respectable, even godly living as people of God.

Paul continues: ³ **This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour,** ⁴ **who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.** (1 Timothy 2:3-4)

So faith, the basis for our prayers, both of supplication and thanksgiving, sinks its foundation way down into God's Word that reveals fullest truth. God's will is for all to be saved – that is, reconciled to Him.

Now it's time to continue beyond today's Thanksgiving text. Listen!

For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

God's will is for all to be saved, we said. *How?* Through the One who alone is Mediator between God and Man--the Man Christ Jesus. The gift of faith in Him brings us to hear His invitation to call upon Him – yes in trouble, yes, in every need. He hears and answers, He delivers. He does it so it matters for eternity. That's the significance of Jesus' own life and death and resurrection. He atones for our faithlessness and selfish hearts that blabber selfish wishes to the air, and instead, gives us the inheritance of Sons of God--we are His own dear children, whom the Father lavishes with love and grace in the gift of His Son.

When Paul wrote similarly to Titus, it underscores this truth he wrote to Timothy, too. Sounds like it's for all God's people to hear!

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14)

From Luther's Small Catechism, the Lord's Prayer, the explanation to the Second Petition reads: *How does God's kingdom come?* God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.

Now doesn't that ground you? Your reason for thanksgiving? **“God's Word Excites Thanksgiving!”** The Word become flesh, is God's own dear Son. Jesus Christ, your Redeemer-Saviour and Lord, who has set you free with your Father in Heaven, and taught you how to pray to Him--this One is the fulfillment of all God's Word. He is the Living God present in and with and for you. He comes to you in the waters of Holy Baptism. He comes to you in His body and blood given and shed to remove the doubt and question of your sins that otherwise leave you separated from your Heavenly Father. He comes to you in His Word of exhortation and urging and encouragement. He makes you a new creation! He claims you as His child through the precious gift of His Holy Spirit who enters your heart and creates living faith within you.

Thanksgiving is the response of faith, which sees this wonder of God's love for us in Jesus, His Son, and tells God thank you! So we begin to see God's gracious will to save us all even at work in the difficulties and terrible things that come upon us. We give thanks for His hand at work in our hearts and lives.

So we come back to this Day of Thanksgiving. A blessed and happy Thanksgiving to you! And you're not left on your own to muster up good feelings. **“God's Word Excites Thanksgiving!”**

So you and I, God's people by His gracious calling, are encouraged, even urged, to speak to God freely! And so we do, in the knowledge of the truth of His salvation through the Mediator, Christ Jesus. In the joy of Jesus who loves us, now it's your turn and mine! Bring freely, in faith, your supplications, prayers, and intercessions for all, especially kings and all in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. And give thanks to God! Truly, our thanks can begin with God's many answers to earlier prayers. And then, look around! Give Him thanks for His provisions far beyond what we have even dreamed to ask, once we begin recounting His mercies to us! And finally, should all else dwindle and crash in, we yet have His eternal promise in Jesus Christ, the Mediator, who sets us free from all sin, and with that, all worry. How exciting He is! He is God's Word in the flesh. And believing in Him, we are simply amazed and joyful, how **“God's Word Excites Thanksgiving!”**