

**HOMILY BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
HOLY MASS FOR THANKSGIVING DAY
CHURCH OF THE LITTLE FLOWER
BETHESDA, MARYLAND
NOVEMBER 23, 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Happy Thanksgiving! Monsignor Vaghi, thank you again for inviting me to your parish. My brothers and sisters, it is good that we are here. Even though Thanksgiving Day is not a specifically Catholic holiday, it is easy for us to make it part of our Catholic worship. After all, the word *Eucharist* means “thanksgiving”. Saint Paul says: “In all circumstances, give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”¹ And the Samaritan in today’s Gospel passage shows us that giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ is the most basic act of worship.

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God *deserves* our thanksgiving. Our culture *needs* thanksgiving. And we, as Catholic Christians, must teach our culture of the need to give thanks, by doing so “in all circumstances”.

Why does our culture need thanksgiving? And here, we are talking not only about the holiday, but the *practice* of giving thanks. Pope Francis explained the reason when he said:

“In a society increasingly marked by secularism and threatened by atheism, we run the risk of living as if God did not exist. People are often tempted to take the place of God, to consider themselves the criterion of all things, to control them, to use everything according to their own will. It is so important to remember, however, that our life is a gift from God, and that we must depend on him, confide in him, and turn toward him always.”²

In other words, the more that people forget God, the more they forget that everything they have is a gift from God. People even forget that every other person has been created by God as a work of his love – whether that person is sitting in the same room, or on the other end of an internet “chat”, or part of the “enemy” with whom they are at war. The world needs us, Catholic Christians, to be people of thanksgiving, because they need to be reminded that all good things, and all people, come from God, who is the Father of us all. As the Pope has said:

“[I]f we are bearers of gratitude, the world itself will become better, even if only a little bit, but that is enough to transmit a bit of hope. The world needs hope. And with gratitude, with this attitude of thanksgiving, we transmit a bit of hope. Everything is united and everything is connected, and each one can do their part wherever they are.”³

How can each of us do our part by giving thanks wherever we are, “in all circumstances”, and not just at Mass? We do so by imitating Jesus in the Eucharist. On the altar, the Lord comes to us most humbly: in a little bit of bread and wine. His method is not to dominate us. On the contrary, he comes as a gift that is given. And not only given, but eaten. He is broken for us, he is crushed for our sins; and the bread and wine which are his body and blood become a medicine for us. How can we not be grateful for so great a gift!

And yet, my brothers and sisters, how often do we, like nine of the ten lepers whom Jesus healed, forget to give thanks? More to the point: how often do we forget to give our lives for others in the same way he has given his body and blood for us? Many of us will be with family and loved ones today. Often these gatherings, while joyful, also challenge our love. It is not always easy to love, even those who are close to us. Will we allow our relationship with others to be truly “eucharistic”? That is to say, will we allow ourselves to be a gift to others? Will we be a kind of “medicine” to someone else – listening to them, seeing them for who they are, offering them comfort, as the Lord has done for us?

This is part of what it means to live a “Eucharistic life”, and it is not an easy thing! But it is possible when we realize that the presence of Jesus does not leave us when we walk out of the church door. Rather, the Holy Spirit remains with us so that, as Paul said in the second reading, “you are not lacking in any spiritual gift” as you live your life.⁴ You meet Jesus here in the Eucharist, and then you leave here, and you meet him in the people you encounter – at home, at the store, online, and back at work. This is how the Eucharist we receive in church brings life to the rest of society. Will we remember to give thanks “in all circumstances”?

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This is the grace we pray for today: that we will become a people full of thanksgiving. Because God *deserves* it, our culture *needs* it, and we are the ones to give it.

And so, in the words of our first reading from Sirach:

“[B]less the God of all, who has done wondrous things on earth [...]. May he grant you joy of heart and may peace abide among you.”⁵

¹ 1 *Thessalonians* 5:18.

² Pope Francis, Address to Members of the Delegation of the “Conference of European Rabbis”, April 20, 2015.

³ Pope Francis, General Audience: Catechesis on Prayer, #20 – *The Prayer of Thanksgiving*, December 30, 2020.

⁴ Cf. 1 *Corinthians* 3:7.

⁵ *Sirach* 50:22a, 23.