

This column was originally printed in the November 2011 issue of New Earth, the newspaper for the Diocese of Fargo.

We lift up our hearts in gratitude to God for his many blessings

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There are three items that I wish to highlight in my column this month: the new Roman Missal, Thanksgiving and a movie recommendation. On the first weekend of Advent, Nov. 26-27, the Catholic Church in the United States will begin to celebrate Mass with the new translation of the third edition of the Roman Missal.

All of you should be aware of this change as it has been announced through your parishes and the New Earth over the last several months. Since September many parishes have begun to use the new music settings based on the new translations of the ordinary of the Mass.

Soon, we will begin to hear the newly translated prayers, prefaces and Eucharistic Prayers. As noted before, the new translation uses more reverent, elevated language that makes us more aware of the transcendent God who has revealed himself to us, and it is more faithful to the Latin original text. You will also hear prayed new options for the Eucharistic Prayer that may not have been prayed before, as the options for their use is more generous.

In the Eucharist, we give thanks to the Father for the gift of his Son, Jesus, and most particularly for the gift of his incarnation, life, death and resurrection. The word "Eucharist" means "thanksgiving" and that is why you hear prayed in every preface the petition by the priest, "Let us give thanks to the Lord." And frequently at the beginning of the prefaces the words, "It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father..." are prayed. Every Eucharist is a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father.

As we begin to pray the new translation of the Roman Missal, may it be a time for every Catholic to renew their intimacy with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and, most especially, grow in an ever deeper thanksgiving and gratitude to the Father for the gift of his beloved Son and the one sacrifice he made for us, and continues to give us, in the Eucharist. May our hearts be filled with wonder and awe at the depth of his eternal love for us.

It is wonderful that this is happening on Thanksgiving weekend, which brings me to my second point. At Thanksgiving we lift up our hearts in gratitude to God for all of the blessings he has bestowed upon us. Our forefathers recognized that God had generously blessed them and our country. They recognized that they were to show their gratitude to the Creator and hence this holiday was put on the national calendar as a time to thank God for blessings received.

At the time it was established, there was no football, television or the mad dash for the day-after-Thanksgiving shopping frenzy for Christmas. It was a day, and still can be a day, for family and friends to gather to give thanks to the one God. We must put God first in our lives, in order for them to be properly ordered according to God's plan.

It is important for us to reflect upon gratitude and giving thanks. We live in a culture which at times does not offer thanks for gifts received, but in many ways sees them as an

entitlement — something I deserve. Many of our young people have lost the art of writing thank you notes, or they will utter a simple quick thank you and then run off to the next thing.

For the Christian, we are called to recognize that everything we have in life is a gift. Psalm 138, verse 1, captures gratitude for the gift of life: "I thank you, Lord, with all my heart; in the presence of the angels to you I sing." And Psalm 139 continues that praise: "You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know...Your eyes saw me unformed; in your book all are written down; my days were shaped, before one came to be. How precious to me are your designs, O God; how vast the sum of them!" (vss 13-14 and 16-17).

As one prays with these psalms one can taste the joy, the gratitude, the wonder and the awe of the beauty of God's creation and most particularly of each human being, including ourselves. St. Augustine would remind the people of his time of the importance of giving thanks to God for the uniqueness of each human being created in the image and likeness of God.

"People travel to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering...Now, let us acknowledge the wonder of our physical incarnation — that we are here, in these particular bodies, at this particular time, in these particular circumstances. May we never take for granted the gift of our individuality" (Saint Augustine of Hippo 354-430).

His words ring even truer in our time, as the gift of human life and the uniqueness of every human being from the moment of conception is frequently disregarded. Even in the everyday things of life we should raise our hearts in gratitude for all of the blessings we have received and what we share in. A heart that is filled with gratitude is a heart that experiences deep joy and peace for the person recognizes that all is gift.

G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) recognized the truth that all is gift when he would state: "You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink." One can see that he had a deep sense of gratitude and the importance of it.

I encourage each of you this Thanksgiving to take some time to reflect on your own gratitude for life and all that you are blessed with. Take some quiet time, possibly in church, before the Blessed Sacrament, or in the quiet of your home to reflect on gratitude and thankfulness. Pray in thanksgiving to the Father for all that he has blessed you with. If you struggle with gratitude, pray for the grace of gratitude and receiving it as gift from the Holy Spirit, for it is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

The final thing I wish to highlight is the movie, "Courageous." The movie is about fatherhood, manhood and being a husband to one's wife. The movie is excellent and surely demonstrates what good movie making can bring to our culture when it promotes authentic values and truth. If you have not seen the movie, I encourage every man to see it. It is a wonderful film, rooted in Christ, which invites men to reflect on the God-given roles entrusted to them. No man should miss this film!

I close with a quote from Henri J.M. Nouwen on gratitude: "Gratitude . . . goes beyond the 'mine' and 'thine' and claims the truth that all of life is a pure gift. In the past I always thought of gratitude as a spontaneous response to the awareness of gifts received, but now I realize that gratitude can also be lived as a discipline. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy."

May each of you have a blessed Thanksgiving!