

I remember the prayer that I said every night with my mother when I was young.

Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. God bless... and then we would list everyone that came to my mind.

It was an early form of thanksgiving – not the best but my experience. The fact that I still remember it shows its power but I can't really say it made me more grateful. So many things slide easily off the tongue, even when you're young, maybe especially when you're young.

The practice of gratitude is one of those things that I know, in my head, will change your life if practiced regularly; but sometimes the time just seems to fly by. **I salute but ....**

Until something happens.

Every time I come back from a trip to another country I must confess I truly feel a sense of gratitude coming back home. What if I had broke my leg in South Africa or had a stroke in the Palestinian refugee camp? Invariably I find myself saying things like "we just don't appreciate how fortunate we are to live where we do." (even people who live in Toronto). Even after slipping across the line for a couple of days in Seattle there is something that settles when I get back on this side. It sounds so much like the stereotype of a Pharisee and so un-Christian and lacking in compassion and all those other things my wife is trying to teach me but part of me murmurs, "Thank God I live here..."

This past week I was in hospital for an afternoon to get some tests. Some preliminary work had come back positive and so a more intensive battery was necessary. Off and on, during the 5 months it has taken to schedule the tests I found myself wondering ... "What if it is cancer and I lived in some other place where they didn't have the preliminary tests much less this one and I would wake up one morning and that would be it." Or, "how fortunate I am that this technology even exists; 100 years ago there would not only have been no cause for concern but no way to tell if the concern was founded or not." I was very thankful to hear the doctor say, "everything looks fine, see you in ten years" and to know there was some basis for the clearance.

**Funny** isn't it? **Sad too I guess.** Is this what it takes to be able to live more keenly aware? "Don't know what you've got 'till it's gone!"

Throughout the ages, we Christians have somehow sensed that we shouldn't have to wait until the bottom could fall out before we remember to be thankful. And so we have developed regular practices - grace before meals, morning and evening prayers that begin with thanksgiving and, during these weekly worship times, prayers of thanksgiving and intercession (aka prayers of the people). But, like all practices, you can recite them as rote or you can use them.

I was saying to someone this week that one of the things I have come to value about corporate worship is the prayers of the people because while they seldom raise things I haven't thought

about or would disagree with the prayer often brings it to the front of my mind, the top of my spirit. Oh yeah, that's right! And Thanks a lot for that too. There are some theological issues that arise with respect to corporate prayer. Some things in the Bible seem to indicate that when we pray together it has more "power" - not quite the right word; people who use the word intention and frequency might say that somehow corporate prayer raises the frequency of our intention, or something like that. I hope that it true but, for myself, they simply help to reset, especially when I am slipping into a little self-pity or I feel alone or, in my self-preoccupation, I feel the shadow side and "why is it all up to me?"

Oh yeah, thanks, thanks a lot.

Oh yeah, thanks a lot that there are people who know my name.

Thanks a lot that there are people who love me and who might actually miss me, at least for a week or so, if I wasn't around

Thanks a lot that there are people to love who are not like me and who pull me out of my own swirling anxieties.

Thanks a lot, thanks a lot for a lot.

One of the things about the practice of gratitude is that it forces us to consider the world might be larger than what we can control. For giving thanks implies that we might actually be receiving something from some ... one, thing, being, .... situation. And that perhaps what we receive is more than what we merit.

**As Christians**, of course, **we go cosmic** quickly. God loves us, in spite of our sense of entitlement, our preoccupations, our depression, our sense of being stuck. We are forgiven even when we get submersed beneath all the reasons we *should be* burdened with guilt. We are prodded towards the deepest yearnings of our heart even when our spirits tell us how impractical they are, how we can't look at them because we're too old, too young, too responsible, too irresponsible and all the rest.

Oh yeah, thanks a lot for not giving up on me, for persisting to put together opportunities, even when we are slow to recognize.

Thanks a lot.

But also, as Christians, we continually are being presented with creeds, hymns, prayers, buildings not of our own devising.

Oh yeah, thanks a lot for all these people and structures which help me have faith, even though I feel I make it all up and choose it all just for myself.

Oh and thanks a lot for that piece of bread and fish that kept me going when I felt pretty well at the end.

But one of the biggest reasons, for me, to practice the attitude of gratitude is not only because it makes my wife like me better, keeps me from being self-preoccupied or living with a sense of entitlement - "Mine" – but because gratitude, thanksgiving opens the heart and the imagination. For, on the big canvas, if God is actually at work bringing to us opportunities and I regularly acknowledge that it shifts my heart and my mind so that I actually begin to live with curiosity and imagination. And those are powerful forces, gifts of God.

Oh yeah, thanks a lot for those as well.

Thanks a lot .... For a lot. Amen.

## Prayers of the People

Our God, we give you thanks

For the long list of things which we take for granted and others in the world consider luxuries – clean water, bathrooms, toilet paper, soccer fields that do not contain land mines, hockey rinks with artificial ice, stores where food is stacked higher than our head, the ability to run unarmed through any part of our city, the freedom to complain, out loud, to strangers on the ferry.

Our God, we give you thanks

For those times you – or someone close to you – has come close to us and flowers have sprouted in the cracks of broken concrete of our life.

We give thanks for lovers, friends, spouses, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and parents, who, at times, bring colour to a black and white sketch of our life.

Our God, we give you thanks for the new world being formed. Thanks for the opportunities that come with the changes to be better, more prosperous, more generous people. We bring before you, for special consideration, those whose livelihoods and sense of who they are will feel the grinding edge of change.

Give support, perseverance and imagination so we may persevere in the race that is set before us. We ask this for ourselves, as individuals and families, but also for us as a congregation and a church. Let us continue to feel and to be aware of those bubbling springs of energy within that may be clues to your presence and power.

Continue your transforming work with those who are bound by addiction, compulsions, fear, mental disorder, self-doubt and other challenges.

It is a lot we ask and there is a lot behind what we ask, we know. We only dare because Jesus said we could and we should and so, as we sing, we pray:

Our Father, which art in Heaven"

"Hallowed be thy Name"

"Thy kingdom come"

"Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven"

Give us this day our daily bread"

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us"

And lead us not into temptation"

But deliver us from evil"

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen"