

GROWING IN GRATITUDE – Gloria Domino 11.19-20 – SMG Virtual Prayer Meeting

Have you ever been so filled with gratitude that you felt you could burst? Most of us have had that experience at one time or another. Maybe you felt that way on the day you were married or on the day your child or grandchild was born. Maybe it happened as you watched a beautiful sunrise. On such days, it's easy to thank and praise God.

But sometimes it can be downright challenging to be grateful, especially when everything seems to go haywire and we feel like we are losing control. We might be unemployed or in a difficult relationship. Maybe we are confined to a hospital room, or perhaps a friend or loved one has died. Many times, we're just plain exhausted from dealing with the day to day stressed of life. How can we learn to be grateful for our blessings even in those situations?

Growing in gratitude is a lifelong process of learning to live in a God-centered way. We begin to recognize and acknowledge that God is close to us and is at work in our lives. We are also able to see how He is blessing us even in those trials that are part of human life. In this teaching, we want to offer six strategies that may help you to become more grateful--both to God and to the people around you.

1. BEGIN YOUR PRAYER EACH DAY WITH PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING.

It's natural to want to ask God to solve our problems when we come to him in prayer. But how much better it would be to begin your prayer time with praise and thanksgiving. For example ,you could say, "Thank you, Lord, for loving me. Thank you for coming in the flesh to save me. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. Thank you even for the trials I'm going through, because I know you will work them out for my good and help me to grow through them".

It's not that God needs your thanks or praise, but He knows how good it is for you to spend the first several minutes focusing on Him and giving Him the honor that He is due. Recalling His love, constancy, and never-ending care puts everything into perspective. No matter what you might be dealing with God is good and has a good plan for your life.

2. PRAY THE PSALMS REGULARLY.

Jesus Himself sang and prayed the psalms. Just as they did for Jesus, the psalms provide us with the words to express a wide variety of emotions to our Father, from sorrow for sin to crying out for help and assistance.

Some psalms are especially helpful for recalling God's goodness and mercy. For example, Psalms 138 begins, "I thank you, Lord, with all my heart; in the presence of the angels to you I sing.....I praise your name for your mercy and faithfulness"138:1,2)

You can use the psalms to praise and thank God, especially when you don't have the words to praise Him on your own.

3. SPEND A FEW MINUTES EACH EVENING THANKING GOD FOR YOUR BLESSINGS THAT DAY.

St Ignatius of Loyola believed that ingratitude was the root of all other sins. So he had his fellow Jesuits do spiritual exercise each evening before retiring. They not only examined their consciences and repented of any sins from the day, but they also thanked God for the way in which He was present to them and acted in their lives. Many people do this exercise, called the Daily Examen, each evening. It is a profound way to grow in gratitude as well as a way to recognize how involved God is in our lives.

So, set aside a few minutes during the evening or before you go to sleep to think of what happened that day. Try to remember hour by hour what you were doing. If you had your prayer time that morning, now as the day comes to a close, perhaps you can thank God for some insight. Maybe you had a warm conversation with a coworker or a family member. Maybe you remembered to call a friend in need. You could even thank God for simple blessings like a warm home on a cold day or a tasty meal at dinner.

By faithfully practicing this exercise, you will be able to see more and more of your blessings, and your heart will be filled with joy as you recall how faithful and loving your God is.

4. LOOK FOR GOD'S BLESSINGS, ESPECIALLY AMID THE DIFFICULTIES OF LIFE.

As we said above, it's much more challenging to give thanks to God when we are going through tough times. But that's when it's especially important to recall how God is taking care of us and our loved ones. It's in those times that we may feel as if God has abandoned us. But when we look with the eyes of faith, we'll find that God is very close to us. He never forgets us. He is faithful to His promise to love us and guide us.

Jane's husband Joe, was dying of cancer. It was the most difficult time in her life. But even on the hard days, Jane recognized that God was present. She saw Him in the priest who came to give Joe Communion and the Anointing of the Sick. She saw Him in caregivers who came each day to help her care for Joe's needs. She saw it in the friends and family who came to bring a meal or to pray with Joe. Even as she grieved at the prospect of losing her husband, Jane was able to thank the Lord for His kindness to her and her husband. Her gratitude to the Lord gave Jane hope in the midst of the most challenging trial of her life.

5. EXPRESS YOUR GRATITUDE TO OTHER PEOPLE.

Have you ever noticed how pleasant it is to be around people who are grateful? They exude a certain joy because rather than complaining or criticizing, they notice and thank people for what they are doing. We all like to feel appreciated. So make it a point to thank the people you interact with each day. Thank the clerk at the grocery store or the receptionist at the doctor's office. Thank your coworkers for a job well done. Thank your pastor for serving you and your fellow parishioners. So many people are serving us each day, showing their love for us in small and big ways. By thanking them, we acknowledge their efforts, which goes a long way toward building warm and close relationships. But don't stop there. Thank your family members, those people you most often take for granted. You might even want to write each of them a short note and tell them all the ways in which you are grateful for them. What a gift that would be to your loved one! Keep a copy for yourself as well to remind you of all that you have to be thankful for because that person is part of your life.

6. THANK GOD AHEAD OF TIME.

What if you were to thank God for His blessings even before you received them? That was the advice of Blessed Solanus Casey (1870-1957), a capuchin friar from Detroit who had a gift for healing. One day the parents of a sixteen month old daughter with leukemia came to his monastery. After praying with her, Fr. Casey told her parents to "thank God ahead of time". The little girl was miraculously healed, but Fr. Casey wanted them to thank God for whatever might happen. By thanking God for what we are asking of Him before we even receive it, we are saying, "Lord I trust that you are working in this situation. Whatever happens, I will give you thanks because of your mercy and goodness." That can be difficult, but such a prayer is a faith-filled affirmation that God is at work even when we can't see it.

GRATITUDE IN HEAVEN.

Think about what it will be like in heaven as we look back on our lives. We will want to thank all the people who helped us to get there, those who taught us about the Lord's love and who led us on the path of discipleship. We will be thankful for all the joys we experienced and even the difficulties, all of which God used to help us grow in holiness. We will overflow with gratitude to the Father, who created us to live with Him forever; to Jesus, who died for us and rose from the dead to save us in countless ways to follow Jesus.

This is the gratitude the Lord wants us to experience even today. May our hearts always overflow with praise and thanksgiving to the God who loves us--always and forever.