



Giving Thanks for Everything

In her book, *Transfigured*, Patricia Sandoval describes her fall from a happy childhood to living on the streets as a drug addict in California. The day she hit rock bottom was also the day that she began to change for the better. As she put it:

“Suddenly and undeniably, I felt a strong presence in the heavens looking down on me. My sobs subsided, and I looked up. The sky was bright blue with billowing clouds. I don’t know how I sensed this, but I knew that the presence was God the Father, watching me at that very moment.”

“Staring into the clouds, I said, ‘You are all that I have in life at this very moment. I’ve hit rock bottom. I have nothing: no friends, no money, no drugs, no family. I’ve ruined my life. I don’t

know how I let myself get to this point, but I know that You exist, and I know You’re listening to me.’ Then something within me, in a moment of grace, made me want to praise Him. I

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exclaimed aloud, ‘I want to thank You for all the many blessings you have given me in my life. You gave me a beautiful childhood, a wonderful family, and I want to thank You for all of that...’

(*Transfigured*, page 75)

There is a maxim in the spiritual life that says if you want more graces, be grateful for the ones you have. In fact, it doesn’t take a leap of faith to see that this applies everywhere in life! After all, whenever we give someone a gift or do them a favor, we are far more willing and likely to do it

again if the person seems genuinely grateful. In fact, it is well known in the corporate world that showing you appreciate your customers helps business. So why is it that, when it comes to God, we have a tendency to forget to thank Him for the many good things He gives us each day?

Perhaps one reason is that we can be easily blinded to the many good gifts that God does indeed give us daily. We have all had days that went very well. Days when everything and everyone seemed to smile at us and gratitude poured naturally from our hearts. On those days, it took no effort to thank God for the many blessings that were tangibly present. On the other hand, we have also had bad days that we were glad to put behind us. Times when things did not go well and it seemed like God had forgotten us. Days like that may find us begging God for help rather than thanking Him for the things that had

come our way. But has God changed? Does He love us on sunny days and abandon us on rainy ones? Our Lord tells us, “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Lk 12:6-7) And yet we can so easily lose sight of God’s love for us when things go from bad to worse. It is then that we cry with the Psalmist, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer; and by night, but find no rest.” (Psalm 22:1-2)

It takes an act of faith for us to believe in God’s loving providence in our lives, regardless of the ups and downs that come our way. The servant of God, Fr. John Hardon, S.J., used to say that we should thank God for all the graces He sends us, not only for the pleasant ones, but **especially** for the painful ones. Why should we be grateful for graces that hurt? Could we even call them “graces” or gifts from God? Certainly! If we truly believe that God is all-powerful, all-wise, and all-loving then it is impossible for Him to simply let bad things happen to us pointlessly. In other words, everything that takes place in our lives must be related to something very good for us. Something that, in the final analysis, makes it all worthwhile; much as the pain that follows an operation is worthwhile if we find ourselves in better health than we were before. What is that “something?” St. Paul tells us that God has a goal in mind for us all, “[f]or this is the will of God, your sanctification...” (1Thes 4:3). Our faith goes on to tell us that each of us has a particular level of holiness that God wishes him or her to reach. Yet how can we reach this on our own, since only God really knows what He has in mind for each of us? Well, the easiest way is to leave it to God to get us where He wants us to be. With this perspective, there is nothing that happens by chance,



St. Josephine Bakhita (1869–1947)

whether good or bad, nor is there anything that is simply an evil in our lives. Everything comes from the loving hands of our Father in Heaven. St. Josephine Bakhita, whose capture as a young girl by slave traders in Africa – cruel and merciless men – eventually led her into the Catholic Church and a religious order in Italy, was able to say, “If I were to meet the slave traders who kidnapped me and even those who tortured me, I would kneel and kiss their hands, for if that did not happen, I would not be a Christian and Religious today.”

So it is well to develop an “attitude of gratitude” especially for the graces that come to us painfully. Why? Well, for one thing, it takes more faith to be grateful for these graces in our lives, which means that an act of gratitude in bad times is worth more in God’s eyes than one made in good times. It also exercises us in the other theological virtues of hope and love, as we have far less (if any!) human motives for

being grateful for things that don’t please us naturally. Besides this, we grow in our resemblance to Christ, our model in the spiritual life, Who was “obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” (Phil 2:8) And the more we resemble Christ in his passion, the more we will resemble Him in His glory as well.

So as we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving this year, let us take time to think of the many different kinds of blessings that God has sent us over the course of this year, or – for that matter – our whole lives. If we find ourselves faltering in gratitude for the things that hurt us, let us ask God’s help to see things from a “divine perspective,” with our sanctification in view. In any case, may we make it a habit to thank God for everything, “always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father” (Eph 5:20), confident that a grace received gratefully leads to another and greater one. ❖