

Glory to God for Everything

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The Last Supper.

Once a pastor visited his sick parishioner in a psychiatric hospital. There one of the patients, who apparently had a period of mental clarity, approached the pastor and asked him, "Do you ever thank God for your reasoning ability?" This unexpected question took the pastor by surprise. It never occurred to him to thank God for such an obvious ability. Only here in the hospital, surrounded by many mental patients, he realized how fortunate he was. Upon leaving the hospital the pastor vowed that he would daily thank God for the mental and physical health He gave him.

This short story reflects our common habit of taking for granted all the benefits of life. Only when we lose something, do we realize that it was God's gift.

Our entire life is a long chain of gifts from our merciful Father! He created our body, which is better than any mechanism or computer. He breathed into us an immortal soul, adorned us with His image, predestined for eternal happiness. He endowed us with intelligence and with free will, thanks to which we can grow intellectually and spiritually, become more perfect and be useful to others. He gave us feelings through which we can enjoy His physical and spiritual gifts and find happiness and joy in life. "Wherever I look with my inner vision," writes St. John of Kronstadt, "inside of me or on the outside, I see an opportunity to thank God for His many blessings!"

But, sadly, seldom do people thank Him who constantly cares for them and endows them with many material and spiritual benefits.

Although God is invisible to our physical eyes, a sensitive heart feels His constant providence, His paternal love, His guiding and caring hand. God blesses us with sunshine and rain, and with different foods He feeds us. By His will, mountains and valleys, seas and rivers, trees and rocks, birds and fish, earth and air, all serve us for our enjoyment. His godly strength supports us continuously and protects our lives from evil and danger. In the words of an ancient writer, *"In him we live and move and have our being."* Every instant of our life is a gift from His never ending blessings, every breath we take is a gift of His fatherly goodwill, every beat of our heart is a deed of His gracious love and mercy.

But that is not all! When we disobeyed God's commandments and became unworthy of life and Divine blessings, God the Father did not destroy us or abandon us to perdition. On the contrary, because of His endless love, He sent, *"His only begotten Son, so that all who believe in him, will not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). The Son of God, taking pity on us, the prodigal children, came to our world and assumed our human flesh. In the words of Saint Paul, *"He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and humbled himself becoming obedient unto death, even the death on a cross"* (Phil. 2:7-8). Going from town to town and from village to village, He taught us how to live righteously to attain the Kingdom of Heaven. He took upon Himself our sins and, with them, the necessary punishment; He suffered for us humiliation, was spit upon, scourged, endured the pain of crucifixion and a disgraceful death at the hands of ungodly soldiers. Spilling His precious blood, He gave up His spirit so that *"through death He might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage"* (Hebrews 2:14-15).

The Holy Spirit, consubstantial with the Father and His Son, because of the redeeming sufferings of Jesus Christ, bestows His Divine gifts upon us, cleansing our conscience of shameful deeds. He brings life and light to our lives, endowing us with His Divine power, so essential for righteous living. He makes us worthy to be called children of God.

In spite of all this, we often forget God, responding to His mercies with our stubbornness, hardheadedness and malice. And still God not only refrains from destroying us but also continues to forgive and have mercy on us, patiently waiting for our reform. In spite of our frequent falls, He guides us with great care and wisdom towards salvation, towards never ending joy and the heavenly habitation. Seldom do people ponder over the many obstacles we create for God to save us.

St. John of Kronstadt shares with us his experiences regarding God's assistance in difficult times. *"How often death entered my heart, then to my body, innumerable times. Yet from all the near death experiences God preserved me."* Feelings of overflowing mercies of God evoked from the psalmist the following inspirational words: *"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget*

not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed ... The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy" (Psalm 103:1-8).

In times of trials many become depressed and grumble. But we must understand that the Lord sometimes allows misfortune and suffering not because He has forgotten us or wishes to punish us. No! He allows them as bitter but necessary medicine, healing us from different passions like pride, light-headedness, self sufficiency, egotism and others. Remembering that, the great Saint John Chrysostom in the twilight of his days said, "Thank God for all, and especially for suffering!"

We, who are Orthodox Christians, must be especially grateful to God who deemed us worthy to be children of His true One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, which by the grace of the Holy Spirit holds the Evangelical teaching in its original purity and which blesses and sanctifies us with its holy Sacraments and Divine services. This is the same Church to which belonged the most holy Virgin Mary, the prophets, the apostles, the innumerable martyrs, all the saints and which has as its head our Lord Jesus Christ. Although they now reside in Heaven, they still belong to the Church, because the Church of Christ is an universal organization, God's one great family, encompassing both Heaven and Earth (Ephesians 1:22-23, 2:19-22, 4:4-6, 5:25-27; 1 Tim. 3:15; Hebr. 3:6). We are taught by the Scriptures that all the saints, surrounding the throne of God, continuously pray for us, their younger brothers (Hebr. 12:22-23; Rev. 5:8-14). It is the Church in which we partake of the life-giving communion of the Body and Blood of our Savior, granting us immortality.

We shouldn't consider thanksgiving as just a duty toward God, but rather as something that should naturally flow from the bottom our heart. As the Sun does not need the sunflower, but rather the sunflower needs the Sun which warms it with its rays, so God does not need our thankfulness, but rather our soul needs God from Whom it receives its health and strength. On the other hand, by reminding ourselves to thank God, we help ourselves. Thanksgiving is similar to the sunflower turning its head toward the Sun. Indeed, when we remind ourselves how much God loves us, and how many are His material and spiritual blessings, these thoughts enlighten our reason and help us to see much clearer the purpose of our earthly existence. This allows us to differentiate between the important and the unimportant, what should be our primary goal and what should be kept in the background. In addition, thankfulness to God disperses despondency, decreases sadness, and returns to us courage and cheerfulness. We all would be much happier if we thanked God more often.

So let us remind ourselves daily, and especially on Sundays, to thank our

Creator and Savior. This activity will be a marvelous medicine for our souls. As a guidance for thanksgiving the following psalms might be useful: 8, 34, 66, 92, 96, 97, 103, 104, 146, 148, 149 and 150. We also include here some thanksgiving prayers.

From the Service of Matins

The Great Doxology

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good-will among men. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks unto Thee for the splendor of Thy glory. O Lord, King, heavenly God, Father Almighty; O Lord, only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit.

O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, who taketh away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us, Thou who taketh away the sins of the world, accept our prayers. O Thou who sitteth on the right hand of the Father, have mercy upon us. For Thou only art holy, Thou only art the Lord Jesus Christ, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Every day we will bless Thee and will praise Thy name for ever and ever. Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, God of our Fathers, praised and glorified is Thy name for ever. Amen.

Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, as we have put our trust in Thee. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes (*three times*). O Lord, Thou hast been our refuge from generation to generation. I said, Lord have mercy upon me, heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee. O Lord, I flee unto Thee, teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God. For with Thee is the fountain of life, and in Thy light we shall see light. Extend Thy mercy unto them that know Thee.

Thanksgiving Prayer

(from the Thanksgiving Moleben)

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Life and Strength of all who put their hope on Thee, Thy mercies cannot be numbered and Thy goodness is infinite! We give thanks to Thee for all the innumerable blessings that Thou hast bestowed upon us during our life. And now we humbly implore Thee, as Thou hast been forbearing until now, so also be merciful to us in the future. Endow us with wisdom, heavenly grace and perseverance in good works, and prepare us for the enjoyment of eternal happiness in life to come.

For to Thee are due all glory, honor and worship, together with Thy eternal Father, and Thy Most-holy, Good and Life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Psalm 146

Bless the Lord, O my soul! While I live I will praise the Lord; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Blessed is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; Who keeps truth forever, Who executes justice for the oppressed, Who gives food to the hungry. The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners.

The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord raises those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over strangers; He relieves the orphan and widow; but the way of the wicked He turns upside down. The Lord shall reign forever; your God, O Zion, to all generations.

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