

THE THANKFUL HEART

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* THE THANKFUL HEART

The sponsor of this gift lecture has asked that it commemorate two events—Thanksgiving and Mrs. Burnell's birthday. It would be difficult to find a more congruous combination of subjects, for my mother's life was one of continual thanksgiving. If there ever was a person in the world who lived a life of grateful prayer, it was she. Gratitude, thanksgiving, and prayer were her way of life and the constant themes of her instruction. Most of you have memorized, at her urging, this quotation:

**I will praise Thee [O Lord] for ever,
because Thou hast done it.

My mother loved Thanksgiving Day. She loved the spirit of the day and also all of its outward festivities; and she always entered

*(Class lecture, November 21, 1951)

**Psalm 51:11, Douay version

into the hospitality of the day with that child-like spirit of delight so characteristic of her. She enjoyed everything, and the reason she enjoyed it all was because she had a truly grateful heart. She never failed to look for and to recognize the constant little miracles—you know well her phrase: "these dear little miracles." She was alert to the miraculous, and no gift of God passed unnoticed by her; she loved and trusted God's power.

Circumstances contradictory to truth inevitably roused in her a resistless demand for healing. Her faith never staggered, but instead, was strengthened in the midst of adverse circumstances. She actually lived the words Paul spoke to the early Christians as his primary recommendation:

*Rejoice in the Lord always;
again, I say, rejoice.

In this sentence the important word is "always"; it is not "Rejoice today, and be in the slough of despond tomorrow"—no! Nor—and perhaps this is more likely—"Be in the slough

*Philippians 4:4, Douay version

of despond today, and intend to rejoice tomorrow." No! Always rejoice, and rejoice in all ways. Rejoicing in God is not measured by circumstances; it is measured by your heart; it is not rejoicing because of appearances, but rejoicing in spite of appearances. If we really love the truth, we do not ask to be excused from the adversities of human life; instead, we rejoice that in the midst of adversities and in spite of conditions we are able to meet every experience victoriously and triumphantly. That is true cause for rejoicing; it is our total immunity in every situation—positive immunity in negative situations! In spite of conditions, praise God, and the adversities fall away; for our eyes are ever toward the Lord, and we rejoice in Him always.

Rejoice in the Lord always;
again, I say, rejoice.

Search your life always for opportunities to be thankful, and store up the memories of every such occasion; for out of the treasure-house of these remembrances comes the stream of your inward thinking. This stream is the mind and

heart you have with you every instant of your life.

Your own intellect, as you know, is an instrument possessing two seemingly contradictory operations. One is called the "rememberer"; the other is called the "forgetter." And it is amazing what can be done with these reverse actions of the mind—remembering and forgetting. It is unfortunate, however, that many people confuse the operations by remembering what they should forget and forgetting what they ought to remember. When they do this, the mind and heart are like a stomach which has been fed dribbles of poison until it gradually becomes a source of infection to the whole body. Do not let the stomach of your memory become unhealthy with remembering things which should have been rejected from the first as unfit for consideration, but keep it healthy by remembering the things of truth. A stomach fed with tainted food for long periods eventually becomes so sick that it rejects any good food, and a mind constantly nibbling at tainted memories becomes so weak

and perverted that it finds no taste for sound doctrine. The unhealthy mind finds it easier to remember unpleasant things than pleasant ones; it dwells morbidly on the unpleasant when it is not functioning properly. But a healthy mind functions correctly, forgetting the things that are not in accordance with truth, or are unpleasant. For this mind's habit, being based on rationality, is one of constant correction of impressions of what ought not to be. Memory must be occupied; for this faculty is formed in such a manner that were we to attempt to keep it vacant, it would still be employed in trying to remember to be vacant.

It is an accepted psychological fact that the mind, left to its natural functioning, will automatically forget unpleasantness. Actually, people forget what they do not want to remember; for example, a healthy, normal woman soon forgets the pain of childbirth in the joy of loving the child. Only a morbid, unhealthy mind continues to dwell on the pain. Psychologists claim that when one continually forgets something, it is because he wants to forget it—

perhaps because some unpleasantness is associated with it—for the mind, left to its normal action, will seek to rid itself of unpleasantness.

To heal the mind is to restore it to that perfect function of remembering truth and forgetting falsity. The mind in remembering truth receives grace, which does not destroy the natural mind but instead perfects it by bestowing upon it a supernatural activity in the form of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. Paul said: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Remembering and forgetting are the reverse actions of one faculty of the mind, called "memory." The operation is this: when you try to remember something, you seek to revive an image. But if you try to revive images that are themselves counterfeits, errors, and lies, you have poisoned your own intellectual principle and have thus distorted your view and judgment. Those who remember only some hurt or slight, who store up bad feelings and let their thoughts dwell on unhappiness, are digging the mental pit into which they are sure to fall. But you say: "what can I do about my wayward

thoughts? When I pray, all manner of unpleasant thoughts suddenly pop into my meditation."

We should understand our minds; for the mind acts much like a spoiled child—the less disciplined it is, the more wayward. However, merely trying to control and suppress thoughts is not true discipline. Simply saying "No!" to the wayward mind is not the answer. Like a naughty child, the more you say "No!" to him, the more determined he is to show his own strength; and that which is forbidden becomes an intriguing ground of experimentation. The mind has this same characteristic when dealt with through disciplinary means.

The solution is to fill the memory so full of the Image of God, the Word of God, that there is no room for anything else. Nourish the stomach of the mind so completely with the words of truth that this supersubstantial bread is your very life. When your thinking instrument is engaged by truth, your loving heart is also occupied with thankfulness; and you rejoice in the Lord in all ways.

The heart and the mind cannot truly be separated. The heart is discontented only when the mind is wayward. In the twenty-third Psalm David proclaims, "He restoreth my soul." With the restoration of soul comes the restoration and healing of heart and mind. David had experienced this; therefore he sang praises.

For a practical application, let us suppose that you are praying, and the name of some person with whom you have a grievance comes into your mind. What can you do? The answer is to take words of truth and pour out such a heartfelt blessing and such gratitude to God for all His mercies, that the grievance is dissolved. The ability to do just this was my mother's special gift. She could never remember anything adverse about anyone. No matter how convincing the circumstances might be, she remembered only the truth; for unreality had no place in her. What a healing gift is this ability! What a happy way of life! Look through—not at, but through—the shadows to find the light.

These words of my mother herself, as she

acknowledged this gift, are so wonderful that I am going to read them to you:

*I have rejoiced over perfection when people have been suffering pain, and when they have been marked with disease; I have rejoiced over their health until the tears of happiness came, and yet up to that moment, there had been no sign of any healing. The healing followed the rejoicing and happy thankfulness.

Paul had this gift, and so did David. Paul could rejoice always; and David, as he looked back upon his life, wrote a song of praise to God's goodness and mercy. He revived the wonderful memories of God's mercies as he looked upon life in retrospect. Adversities were forgotten, and blessings remembered.

The particular Psalm I have in mind is one my mother especially loved, for it is an exhortation to bless God at all times for His mercy and for His constancy.

**Bless the Lord, O my soul:

*Via Negativa 116, by Mary Lamoreaux Burnell, page 22

**Psalm 103:1, King James version

Not with our lips alone are we to bless the Lord; devotion is not mere lip service. Gratitude and thanksgiving should spring to the lips from the heart. There is a definite affinity between the word "think" and the word "thank." In the written words only one letter distinguishes them, but the two words are spiritually related—in fact they are heavenly twins. Some authorities even believe the two words to be derived from the same root, and in the Anglo-Saxon they are given as synonymous.

These heavenly twins, "thinking" and "thanking," are inseparable. A thoughtful person—that is, a really thoughtful person—must naturally be a thankful person. The really grateful person is one whose every breath is praise and thanksgiving; the outward sign is an expression inspired from within. In fact, the experience is more one of "thanks-living" than of "thanks-giving"; a glorifying way of life in which, in every circumstance—good or bad, even though surrounded with adversities—our heart and mind are stayed on God.

When one looks on life in retrospect, as

David did, he should be able to see as absolute reality the hand of God in human affairs—not bringing adversity and hardship, but bringing the courage and the wisdom to meet and overcome adversity and hardship. Religion should be recognized as not an escape from reality, but rather as the open door to the absolute reality beyond the shadows. The grateful soul is one who feels thankfulness for this absolute reality, untouched by shadows; it is one who remembers God as his strength and wisdom and light even when darkness persists. A grateful memory recalls mercies and blessings rather than miseries and despair. Forgetfulness of God results in pessimism; but the true remembrance of the Creator discerns, even in the midst of shadows, the presence of divine providence, of wisdom, and of the love of God.

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Are you able to do this? Or do you let your emotional energies become dissipated in complaints? Do you turn away from God in the weakness of following appearances, or do you

turn toward Him with the power of your being? Do you use all the power of your soul for blessing God, for gratitude to God for the strength, the goodness, and the mercy which His providence holds available for you?

... all that is within me,
bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits:

Let us store up in this treasury of the soul all the benefits and all the mercies, at the same time using this very faculty to forget that which ought not to be. For if our mind is entirely full of God's goodness, and if our heart overflows with praise, there is no room in either mind or heart for anything else.

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;
who healeth all thy diseases.

What is this forgiveness? What are these benefits for which we praise God in our soul when all that is within us gives praise?

Notice that the true mystic is not thankful merely for the so-called "good things" of life, but also for the strength, courage, and under-

standing with which to meet whatever comes—even seeming disaster—and so transform threatening defeat into victory. Recognition of God and trust in Him, even in the darkest night, even in the midst of conditions that seem to be adverse, must always be the greatest light in personal experience.

First, what are all these benefits which we must not forget? Forgiveness is one of the greatest of God's benefits. Lest we forget this, God sent His own Son to reveal the supernatural forgiveness bestowed on all mankind. The Saviour canceled all our debts; there could be no greater blessing than this. Let us never forget God's wonderful benedictions no matter how distracting surrounding circumstances may be. Let us never forget the perpetual good God bestowed upon us.

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who
healeth all thy diseases.

We have, of course, many physical benefits to be grateful for; but let us not stop with these, for objective phenomena are at the lowest level of God's power. Remember this: Signs

and wonders are at the lowest level of God's power! It is regrettable that most people cannot see beyond these objective goods; they are not able to penetrate through the shadows of physical demonstration to the substance of the greater good, the absolute reality of God's Presence. Let us not be diverted by the alluring material good. Those who look only to material advantages as a reason for gratitude become so greedy that they miss truth itself. Covetousness for demonstration leads to frustration; for material good is only relative, whereas we are made for absolute good. Could you be content with the meager rations of the Pilgrim Fathers? Yet they were thankful for them and established and set aside a day out of every year to express gratitude to God for them. If you had to live in such circumstances as they did, would you feel grateful today?

Our ideas of material good, of physical comfort, even of ordinary necessities, are definitely relative. So when thankfulness rests only on the receiving of material benefits, one has lost the secret of thanksgiving.

Who can gauge the supernatural gifts of God by material measurements and designs? Objective, relative good is included, rather than excluded, in God's gifts; but the desire must be first for the spiritual good, for the absolute good. Our Lord told us to seek first the kingdom of heaven, and that all these things—these other things—would be added. Let us not, however, try to seek the kingdom of heaven in order to obtain these other things; for this ends only in utter frustration. No wonder such seeking is frustrated, for God sees the heart of man and knows the underlying motives. Because we were made for totality, for absolute good, life will not let us settle on a material level for our happiness. The constantly changing situations and circumstances of the world will not permit us to settle into any static state of pseudo happiness. We must always be seeking and finding greater and greater horizons of good until we find God Himself.

When our ancestors first stepped upon the shores of this America. They fell on their knees under the open sky to give thanks to God. To-

day human progress has carried us to the point of forgetting, in the bustle and excitement of the holiday, the simplicity of the first Thanksgiving Day in America. Do we go out into the front yard and fall upon our knees before the open sky and offer our prayers of gratitude? Scarcely! And we need not perform such an objective drama. Yet we have had years of spectacular protection and deliverance and an overwhelming abundance of the good things of earth, both as individuals and as a nation. The Pilgrim Fathers did not expect a big table set with a nice, fat turkey and all the "trimmings"; yet they were thankful—full of thanks, running over with thanks—for the safe harvesting of their crops, for the simple things we take so much for granted—shelter, food, freedom to worship and to be thankful.

Yes, truly, gratitude for objective things is only relative. The idea of the turkey merely symbolizes the many luxuries we have come to demand. Not only do we forget to offer gratitude for these goods, but we complain and murmur if we do not have as much of

everything as we imagine we should have. We are too ready to complain of our circumstances; we are too liable to forget to bless and thank God; so it is no wonder that our picture of life is out of focus.

There is no better correction to bring our picture into harmony with truth than to follow the rule that Paul laid down—that is, to pray constantly, to rejoice always, and again to rejoice in all ways. Give praise to God in all circumstances. Give praise always for the absolute reality of truth, the center and core of your being. Rejoice always in the spiritual strength and understanding which enables you to stand in the face of circumstances and ultimately transcend them.

The kingdom of heaven is to be our goal. When we strive to reach it for itself alone, then these other things—these "dear little miracles" and the big miracles too—will fall into place so naturally that we shall have to be most alert to recognize them as divine gifts, so fitting, so congruous will they be.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits;

Who forgiveth all thy iniquities.

Let us never be without remembrance of the forgiveness of God, which is one of our greatest benefits. Think how much He is forgiving us all the time—all our delinquencies, all our shortcomings; He is constantly forgiving us and blessing us. His patience with us and His forgiveness stand as a perpetual example to us in our relative, human life, showing us how we should deal with our neighbor for a full and blessed human life.

We all want the so-called "good things of life," but usually we allow our minds to reduce the idea of good to material levels. But material levels of good, no matter how progressive, fail to secure for us the real satisfaction that comes by knowing truth.

A fable is told in India, that illustrates this point about satisfaction's being elusive and unstable unless grounded in truth. It seems that a mouse was desperately afraid of a cat. A kindly magician overheard the mouse complain-

ing because of the terrifying cat and was moved to such sympathy that he considered how best to relieve the torturing situation for the poor little creature. He decided that the most advantageous way would be to put the mouse in a position of equality with the enemy; then it would not be at a physical disadvantage. So, with his magic arts, he gave the mouse a new form—the form of a cat.

For a matter of moments the situation was relieved; but soon things were right back where they were before the magician's help, because the new cat was terrified at a dog, larger and more powerful than itself. So the magician, being of a patient disposition, gave it the form of an equally large and powerful dog. But this did not save the situation; there was even greater trouble, for then a tiger appeared to overwhelm the dog with fear. Now at last the magician saw how useless all this manipulation of relativities really was, and, his patience exhausted, he said: "Go back to being a mouse—at heart you have never been anything else!"

How true this is! We move with the progress

of the world to different levels of experience, but at each stage—unless we are grounded in unchangeable truth—new fears and worries develop. With this cat-and-mouse game of life, we have now reached the atom-bomb stage of fear; and we wonder what is next. We obtain what consolation we can out of the situation; for, at least at this stage, the tiger is no more at ease than the mouse!

There is a book called "Mystical Phenomena," written by Albert Farges, wherein is described the power of God in relation to man. It is interesting to note in this account that physical miracles are referred to as "accidental phenomena," while the essential and true spiritual life is the permanent awareness of God, independent of signs and wonders. The person who seeks after accidental phenomena tends to forget absolute reality, which does not need to demonstrate its presence. Satisfaction on the basis of world levels always exposes the heart of a mouse and seems never to be delivered out of adverse circumstances nor to be adequate to any situation.

The child of God who recognizes the Heavenly Father and His providence continues to pray and express gratitude for the ever present benefits, visible or invisible. The grateful heart is free from all mouse-like qualities; for it receives the benedictions of God's providence and trusts in His love, wisdom, and goodness.

Each and every one can easily be grateful when life is running smoothly and affairs are going just exactly the way we believe they should; but it takes the true mystic to be grateful and thankful to God in the midst of adversity. Paul, as a primary recommendation to the early Christians, given especially in his Epistle to the Thessalonians, emphasized praise of God, the thankful heart, and the spirit of rejoicing in God, which are entirely independent of surrounding circumstances. Rejoice always, he says. If one cannot take this independent view but goes along with appearances, he looks around at his circumstances and says, "What have I to rejoice over?" And despair floods out gratitude.

This thankful heart is not, however, one that

endeavors to disregard surroundings; what are called the "situations of life" must be faced and estimated. The true mystic is not an escapist; he does not run away from unpleasantness or danger. Just the reverse: he has the ability to stand firm in the midst of chaotic conditions, and as Paul enjoined, prays constantly. And because there is no true prayer that is not also an expression of gratitude, he praises God constantly. Pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances, is the rule of the true mystic. But remember, this rule does not mean that we are to give thanks to God because of adversities; it means, rather, that we are to keep our eyes and our hearts on God in order to meet these adversities with wisdom and strength.

A circumstance is a surrounding condition. Man goes through life feeling surrounded with circumstances when he should, rather, recognize that he lives and moves and has his being in God. Let us not be caught in the pictures of present circumstances, but let our praise of God penetrate the surroundings to give glory

to the Most High for His protective mercy. Thus every prayer is a recognition of God's mercy.

The rule for prayer is: When you pray desiring anything, believe you have received. Now, if you really do believe that you have received, you are naturally grateful; but if the adverse circumstances around you are more convincing than your faith, you postpone gratitude, and the rule becomes only a series of words. Signs follow them that believe; signs do not lead to belief. Therefore, stimulate faith with gratitude. Be grateful because you really believe that you have received—even before the answer becomes manifest.

How important it is to begin each day with a prayer of gratitude to God, stimulating our memories with spiritual recollection. Memory is a faculty of the thinking instrument. Memory is the storehouse of thought, and gratitude acts to stimulate our memories of good. Memory, called the "stomach of the mind," is stimulated through recognition of divine mercies. The more we pray to God in gratitude, the

more aware we are of the good gifts bestowed. Every day is for thanksgiving, and every day is an occasion of receiving from the bountiful richness of the Supreme.

Thanksgiving Day, one of America's most important holidays, was originally established subject to the President's proclamation; but why should we not extend and deepen the occasion of thanksgiving to awaken in the heart the true spirit of gratitude, that inner sense of thankfulness, that inner-mindedness which pervades experience with vital intelligence? We have this national reminder to turn to God in gratitude on this one day, but why should we confine our prayers and expressions of gratitude to so limited a time? The spirit of the day is not expressed in eating turkey, but in praising God and praying to Him with thankfulness for His goodness. We live and move and have our being because of His constant gift of life and of all good; therefore we ought not to restrict our spirit of thinking about Him and of thanking Him, to one day in the year only. Those who know the source of their good have

thoughtful minds and thankful hearts; and their gratitude spreads from the one day to every day in the whole year, and from one year to a lifetime of praise and gratitude.

Why not a proclamation to make every day a national thanksgiving for the protection and benefits continuously received from God—a national Holy Day every day in recognition and remembrance of our Creator? Not a holiday to stop work, but a day to work harder at remembering and loving God and our neighbor.

I have here a paragraph written by Henry Victor Morgan. There is no reference to the text from which it originated except that it is from a thoughtful mind and a thankful heart. The words reveal the secret of the continuous thanksgiving of the true mystic. Are you a true, or a pseudo mystic? The answer becomes clear according to the manner in which you receive and apply this message:

*To the true mystic every day is thanksgiving day. And in the beautiful language of Whittier, 'We should strive each morn

*Henry Victor Morgan

to feel anew the Lord Christ born.' It is easy to give thanks for the good things that come to us; but only faith in the Living God will enable us to meet disaster with a song, feel sure of victory in defeat, and rise refreshed the foe to meet.

As the birth of Jesus is the most important event in history, so the greatest day in individual experience is that in which Christ is born anew in our own hearts and becomes a Light that brightest shines in darkest night.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget
not all his benefits;
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;
who healeth all thy diseases.

There are no diseases of soul or body that God's love does not heal. He forgives the iniquities of the soul and heals the defects of the flesh by His Word.

Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;
who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and
tender mercies;

Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things;
so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles.

The Lord executeth righteousness and
judgment for all that are oppressed.

*Psalm 103

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our
iniquities.

For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear
him [and love him and reverence him].

As far as the east is from the west, so far
hath he removed our transgressions from
us.

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the
Lord pitieth them that fear him.

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting
to everlasting upon them that fear him,
and his righteousness unto children's
children;

To such as keep his covenant, and to those
that remember his commandments to do
them.

The Lord hath prepared his throne in the
heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.

Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel
in strength, that do his commandments,
hearkening unto the voice of his word.

Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye min-
isters of his, that do his pleasure

Bless the Lord, all his works in all places
of his dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul.

Let us remember the real purpose of tomorrow, Thanksgiving Day, when it dawns. Let us bless the Lord and all His works in all places. But let us not restrict this spirit to one day only; instead, let gratitude become the spirit of our new way of life. Let our new way be a thanks-living with a thoughtful heart; a living with our heavenly twins, "thinking" and "thanking," which are as inseparable as the Siamese twins about whom we read so much—that the one cannot live without the other. Thoughtfulness—intelligence and thankfulness have one life stream. These words, "thinking" and "thanking," are in spirit inseparable companions; they have a natural affinity and are indissolubly united. Their marriage is a fruitful one, for from their union proceed both essential and accidental phenomena.

The truly prayerful life is a life of sincere thankfulness, and both are characteristics of the true mystic who sees every day as an opportunity to express love and gratitude to God. That is the true mystic; he expresses thanksgiving from his heart, for the heart given to

God overflows in praise and in prayers for all of God's benefits.

We can not practise true prayer unless we have a grateful heart. There is no true prayer that is not an expression of gratitude to God. Gratitude is the very essence of prayer—the spirit and life of prayer. No one can practise the principles of prayer without this essential spirit. Rejoicing in the Lord, and again rejoicing, enables us to pray constantly, giving thanks to God in all circumstances and letting all that is within us sing His praise.

*We come to our prayer as we go to the altar, because our Lord wishes it, in order to be with Him, which is the essence of prayer, not for any sensible consolation and delight. However dry and apparently empty the time of prayer may have been, we may, and should end it with an immense thanksgiving to God for that inestimable privilege He has granted to us in drawing us to Himself and enabling us to give so short a time to being in His presence [that privilege of coming close to God]. That owing to our frailty and weakness it has been dry or full of distractions matters but little

*Priesthood and Prayer,
by the Rev. Father Bede Frost, O.S.B., page 137

or not at all; it is our will and desire which count and to which an abundant reward will be given.

We often feel that our prayers are empty and dry, but our own feeling in the matter is of no importance. We are not approaching the altar of God in prayer for our own sense of consolation but rather as an opportunity—not as a duty, but as a privilege—to express gratitude for the eternal and infinite presence of God. A heart so touched with remembrance overflows with immense gratitude. The recollective heart overflows in thanksgiving and praise of Almighty goodness.

Every day of every month in the year our heart should sing praises to God: Let all within us bless His Holy Name. What a privilege God has bestowed upon us in letting us express His praise! Let our hearts overflow with an immense thanksgiving to God for the privilege He has given us by permitting our approach to Him in prayer.

*All the Presence there is,
All the Power there is,
All the Consciousness there is,
Is *Love*, the *Living Spirit Almighty*.

GENEVIEVE BURNELL FORGEY

*Axioms: Book of Health, by
George Edwin Burnell, page 80



