

Deuteronomy 8:1-10
Thanksgiving (Eve)
November 23, 2022

Many of us look forward to a loaded table tomorrow. Whether the menu includes the traditional turkey with all the trimmings plus yummy desserts or something unique to your family (I've heard of pizza as the regular entrée of one), we waddle away from the meal with more than enough, ready for an afternoon of football watching, playing games or taking a nap. God's Word has a reminder for us at that time.

WHEN YOU'VE EATEN AND ARE FULL...

- I. Look back
- II. Look around
- III. Look up

As the Israelites occupied their new homeland and enjoyed its fruits, they had good reason to look back. "Remember how you got there," Moses was reminding them. He called attention to the way God had led them there over the past forty years. His presence had gone with them, visible in the pillar of cloud leading the way in the daytime and the pillar of fire protecting them at night. God's help became specific in the various items he provided for the people, often in miraculous manner. Think of their food. The Sinai Peninsula and the Arabah, the land south of Canaan, were desert lands, not in the least able to support a nation in which the adult men alone numbered 600,000. The Lord provided water in a dry territory. Each morning, except Saturday, the people discovered a small, round seed on the ground which they called manna. It could be ground into flour for baking, and oil was obtained from it. Thus they had food. To provide variety in the diet God also sent quails to their camp on a couple occasions.

People need clothing, but unsettled conditions while traveling aren't conducive to making garments. Their all-wise Benefactor took care of that need as well. "Your clothes did not wear out." Remember, that was for forty years. A miracle indeed. The same was true of their sandals. As a result, "Your feet did not swell during these forty years." No blisters or any problems that would have resulted from walking through the desert.

Divine protection went beyond the conditions of their feet. Along the way different groups of people tried to halt their progress. God gave them victory.

One other aspect of the journey Moses directed the people to look back on, which they might not have called good. "He humbled you." The Lord allowed certain troubling situations to occur. By means of distress and lack of some items, he

brought them to feel the need for help. It pointed out their dependence on God. So the humbling experiences served a good purpose. They were part of the education of his people. It was also to test them, according to Moses. It placed them in a position to reveal what was in their hearts. Did they really believe in God's omnipotence and love? Did they trust his care?

An aspect of the manna provision did just that. "To teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." They had to trust in God for food one day at a time. No hoarding was allowed, for excess manna collected became infested with worms. It was not man's ordinary food but taught them that simply by giving his command, God can provide for our needs. We could live on air if it were sanctified by the Word of God for that purpose.

Because the humbling experiences brought those results, they were good for the people. The text compared them to a father's disciplining of his children. It is necessary for them to grow into responsible and mature adults. As the Israelites looked back they could be grateful also for that humbling. Bad times are included in the Bible's encouragement, "Give thanks in all circumstances." Even in the midst of difficulty the believer can sing out with a composer of old,

"What our father does is well;
May the thought within us dwell!
Tho' nor milk nor honey flow
In our barren Canaan now,
God can save us in our need,
God can bless us, God can feed."

When we look back we can't always see the good. We focus on the things we lacked, what we wanted but didn't receive. Complaining comes easier than thanking. We grumble about inflation and gas prices, the cost of food and supply chain issues. Take another look back and you will see blessings beyond number, items overlooked or taken for granted. We often give the impression that God owes us certain things and we grumble if they are missing, rather than giving thanks when we receive them.

Each of us must make our own review of the past and count the blessings. Whatever life brought, know this: it was for your good. So many things we have to remember. God has given life itself, health, occupation and an adequate living. He has brought us safely to this day.

Direct your thoughts also to your past spiritual blessings. Thank God for Christian parents who reared you in the fear of the Lord. Praise him for making you his own

in Holy Baptism. Remember the teachers who shared God's ways with you. To look even further back, most of all we give thanks to God for sending his Son into the world to be our Savior. How can anyone say there is nothing good to look back on?

II.

Thanksgiving is not just a time for nostalgic memories. God's goodness remains in the present, so Moses also instructed, "Look around." In particular, look at the land God is giving you. Much earlier God had promised their forefathers Abraham and Jacob that the land of Canaan would belong to the Israelites. Since that time they had spent four centuries in Egypt and forty years roaming the territory in between. Now they were at the doorstep. God was keeping his promise.

What a land was in store for them! "The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills." Quite a contrast with the hot, dry desert they had traveled through. There would be pasture for the flocks to graze on. It would produce bountiful crops: wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates and olive oil were mentioned. The report of the spies forty years earlier when they were first at the edge of this land agreed. They had brought out the branch of a grapevine that it took two men to carry on a staff. It was a land flowing with milk and honey.

Mineral resources were also present. "The rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills." Look around, Israel, Moses urged, and see what your God is doing for you. Those blessings would continue.

Moses could have been describing America, for the fruits of our land are unparalleled. The statistic keeps shrinking of what percentage of our population can feed the rest of us, and other parts of the world as well. The supply of natural resources and the discoveries of science and technology produce mountains of goods for our use. Remember that tomorrow as you eat and are full. Look around you. See the bounty on the table. Notice the conveniences and labor-saving gadgets in the kitchen. Appreciate the luxuries and comforts as you retire to the warm living room or family room. The Israelites would have been astounded.

As you look around you might also see family members. They are a blessing, a source of comfort, companionship and help. How often do you remember to thank others for the role they fill in your life?

Then there is our church life. Surely we are anxious to have the pastoral vacancy filled, but God has still been with us. Worship services continue to share God's saving message. The Holy Spirit carries out his work of building our faith stronger. Children were brought to the Lord in baptism and confirmations

occurred. Opportunities to study the Word are available. A new roof protects us from the elements. All reasons to give thanks.

III.

Whether we look back or look around, at our individual lives, our family, our nation or our congregation, there is a common denominator in the blessings we see, and that is the source. That's the reason Moses told his people, when you've eaten and are full, look up. Admit that the Lord has been good to you. When things are going great it is easy to forget. That was a danger facing the Israelites. Once they had settled in the Promised Land and were enjoying its benefits, they might be inclined to say, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." Personal egos notwithstanding, that's simply not the case. It's not your ingenuity and hard work that produces your income and security. It is the blessing of your gracious God. Rarely does he use miracles to provide for us as he did during the journey of Israel through the desert, but he is still directly responsible for all we have.

He opens his hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing, a familiar psalm verse reminds us. He supports the livelihood of man and beast, of believers and unbelievers. Even more important, God sent his Son for everyone. Jesus died to pay for the misdeeds of all sinners and since everyone is sinful, that means he came for us all. Those who come to faith actually receive the peace and joy of his forgiveness and above all, the promise of eternal life with God in heaven.

Will we not respond with words and songs of praise? As Moses reminded the Israelites, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you." Give credit where it is due. Be like the leper who returned to glorify God, not like the nine who continued on their way to enjoy his goodness but failed to acknowledge the giver.

Show your gratitude in your actions. "Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and revering him," Moses instructed. Obey him. Serve him. Do his work. The Lord is the source of such behavior, for on our own we cannot begin to do God's will. As forgiven sinners, converted and blessed children of God, we do strive to please him by the power of the Spirit who now lives in us. In today's Gospel Zacchaeus was an example of the believer's grateful response. Thanksgiving became thanksgiving.

Amidst the joyful activities of the day, when you have eaten and are full, look back and look around at all your blessings and then look up to the Lord in thanks. Don't limit it to the fourth Thursday in November, however. Every time you eat and are full, give thanks to God.