

## GIVE THANKS

Few spiritual exercises are more important than offering thanks to God. Frankly, many of us are not very good at heeding the biblical admonition, "In all things give thanks" (Ephesians 5:20). We tend to be more conscious of what we lack than of what we have in abundance. We look around and see what we don't have rather than look within our lives and rejoice at the richness of the gifts God has poured upon us.

If we deliberately take an inventory of the blessings in our lives, chances are we will become more positive. Yes, it is easy to focus on the things we wish we had but don't or the things we used to have but lost. But to do so will drain away the pleasure we might otherwise find in life. The fact is that none of us are without reasons to be thankful. If we allow a sense of lack or loss to dominate our attention we will never experience gratitude toward God and the satisfaction that comes with it.

Everything does not have to be perfect for us to have reason for thanks. In fact even when the walls of our lives seem to be crumbling down around us, it is possible to maintain a spirit of thankfulness that can help sustain us in the midst of loss. A great hymn often used in Thanksgiving services is "Now Thank We All Our God," written by Martin Rinkart in 1663. The first verse is as follows:

Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices;  
Who from our mother's arms has blessed us on our way  
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

This song may strike us as one written during a time of peace and plenty when blessings were easy to see by all. But in fact it was written during the Thirty Years' War. Starvation, devastation and disease were all around. Thousands upon thousands had been killed in the conflict, including Rinkart's own family. Yet despite the horrors, he opened his eyes to the good that comes from God, even where suffering abounds. In the second verse his faith is expressed but pain and problems are acknowledged as well.

O may this bounteous God through all our lives be near us,  
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;  
And keep us in his grace, and guide us when perplexed,  
And free us from all ills in this world and the next.

We do not give thanks because life is always pain-free or because every one of our efforts end in victory or because we have everything we want or because all of our cherished relationships remain intact. Sometimes our thanks serve as an expression of defiance in the face of loss. Though our lives are not all we might wish them to be, our thanks declare, "Nevertheless!" Nevertheless, the gifts of God pour down all around us. Nevertheless, the promises of God are reliable. Nevertheless, hope is stronger than despair. God is good.

"It is good to give **thanks** to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High" (Psalms 92:1).