

It's Thanksgiving Day weekend. Do you have an attitude of gratitude?

In Canada, our Thanksgiving weekend of feasting happens at harvest time. In churches, homes, and public places we display symbols of the abundance of the fruits of the earth with which we and our country have been blessed. Although first celebrated here by Martin Frobisher in 1578 to give thanks for safe travels in the arctic, the feast later became associated with gratitude for good crops in a harsh land. In 1957, our Parliament established the current date, declaring, "A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed—to be observed on the 2nd Monday in October."

When European pioneers arrived, they learned that the Algonquin had six annual thanksgiving festivals. We cannot thank God too much!

At many church services this Sunday, we will hear the story of the ten lepers Jesus healed (Luke 17.1–10). Only one of the ten returned to thank Jesus. His appreciation was exuberant! He praised God in a loud voice and knelt at Christ's feet. He was an outsider, a Samaritan, who was not automatically chosen by God. Because of his enthusiastic gratitude, Jesus said to him, "Your faith has saved you." (Some translations say, "made you whole.") Not only did he now have unmerited health, but his gratitude also opened the possibility of eternal life.

Jesus asked, "Where are the other nine?" Are we like the grateful Samaritan or the nine ingrates? Every perfect gift comes from God the Father (James 1.17). We do not deserve these gifts. Yet ingrates may believe they earned them, or they won't acknowledge they come from God, or they resent that they got less than they wanted. We cannot know. Ingratitude remains a mystery of the human heart.

A book by the Benedictine Brother David Steindal-Rast helped me develop a spirit of gratitude: *Gratefulness, The Heart of Prayer: An Approach to Life in Fullness*.

Brother David tells how he escaped the Allied bombing of his town by sheltering in the entrance to his parish church in Austria. As he picked himself up and dusted off his clothes, joy suffused him. Everything around him sparkled with light. A sense of gratefulness has stayed with him ever since. My dad had a similar experience after surviving a heart attack: every day was a blessing for which he was thankful. Brother Steindal-Rast says, "The root of joy is gratefulness...It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful."

Numerous medical studies show that grateful people are healthier and happier,

regardless of their material wealth. In addition, knowing whom to thank—Jesus—opens heaven’s door to us. Humbly thanking can give us health, happiness, and heaven.

And Steindal-Rast adds, “Gratefulness is the key to a happy life that we hold in our hands, because if we are not grateful, then no matter how much we have we will not be happy—because we will always want to have something else or something more.”

On this long weekend, when we celebrate Thanksgiving Day, we might think about our unmerited gifts: well-being, family, friends, and work. The believing Christian would add gratitude also for the graces received from God: being created in God’s image and likeness, redeemed by Christ, and accompanied by the community of the church.

The fifteenth century German Dominican mystic, Meister Eckhart once remarked, “If the only prayer you ever said in your whole life was ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.” Gratefulness lies at the heart of prayer and everything else that is sacred.