

✠ Luke 11:11-17 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

Whether the Pilgrims and Indians celebrated the first Thanksgiving in peace and unity, charity and brotherly love, the historians will have to battle over. But the meaning is understood. This Day of Thanksgiving comes at the close of the harvest. Now the crops are in and the fields are at rest. We have received from the Lord the bounty of the earth and so we give thanks to our Creator for all that we have.

It is He who gives food to every creature. He provides for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call. So much more does your heavenly Father give you what you need to support this body and life. The very air you breathe and the feet you walk around on are gifts of God. And we are thankful for them; thanking Him and praising Him for all that we have.

And it is easy to be thankful for those things; the things that come wrapped in nice packages with pretty bows on top. It is easy to be thankful for good weather and good health; good neighbors and good friends. It is easy to give thanks for those things we see the benefit of and take pleasure in. It is not so easy to be thankful for God's gifts that come wrapped in suffering, heartache, and betrayal.

But the Lord disciplines those He loves. That does not mean that every seemingly bad thing that happens in your life is punishment for sin. Such an understanding of the word "discipline" is shallow and short-sighted. Rather, to discipline means to train, to make ready, to prepare. A disciple is one who learns from the master. Sometimes that learning is pleasant, like when God gives you your children and grandchildren. He is teaching you the gift of love and life. Or when He gives you good jobs and food aplenty. He is teaching you to care for His creation and walk in brotherly love. And sometimes that learning is not pleasant, like when He allows crops to fail and tornadoes to hit and children to die.

But rest assured, God disciplines those He loves. He teaches those He loves. He teaches them to trust in Him and to run to Him in every trouble, to pray, praise, and give thanks in all circumstances and trials. But how? How do we give thanks when things seem to go so terribly wrong in life? Not when things go terribly wrong because of our greed or pride or self-promotion, for God does not let sin go unpunished; but when things out of our control seem to go so terribly wrong how do we thank the One who is in control?

Well, we don't give thanks by saying, "That's just how life goes." Jesus is the life of the world and He doesn't go bad. Death is bad. Sin is bad. Life is good. Life is a gift from God. Life doesn't go wrong. Life always goes right. Even when we suffer for our own sinful pleasures life goes right. Because God's Law is written on our hearts. Jiminy Cricket was right to a large degree: let your conscience be your guide.

The bad things that happen, the hurts we endure and the suffering we suffer and sometimes inflict on ourselves and others are all a result of death entering the world. They are not the result of life coming into the world.

But we do give thanks to God for His discipline. For He disciplines those He loves. And that is how we can give thanks to God in all things, good and bad; by knowing that He

disciplines those He loves; by knowing that He is teaching us to depend more fully on His love in Christ Jesus.

And He loves us so much that He drowns our old Adam. He violently and forcibly removes from us the things that separate us from Him. He loves us so much that He is even now cutting off dead branches and pruning useless limbs. He is making us in His image, re-fashioning us in the image of His Son. Rejoice in suffering for the sake of the Name, for such suffering is blessed by God. That doesn't mean that we only rejoice when we are persecuted by men for following Jesus, but also when we suffer the unpleasant and often humbling removal of sin and shame by our heavenly Father.

We hear these things in sermons or read them in daily devotions, and we are quick to agree and say "amen". But when God actually does it, when He actually confronts us with our sin asking what He asked Adam, "Where are you?" We fuss and whine, spurning the rebuke of the Lord. Repent.

Give thanks to the vinedresser even as He prunes and reshapes you, for He does so for your good and benefit. He does so like a loving father to a child. Do not spurn the rebuke of the Lord or cast His Word from you. Rather let the prayer of the psalmist be on your lips: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving by calling on the name of the Lord. That is, have faith, believing that God desires to be your God, bringing you to salvation in Christ Jesus. Hold preaching and His Word sacred, and gladly hear and learn it. Pray and praise, come to your heavenly Father with ever petition and request, with every trouble and every praise. Confess your sin. For confession is nothing but admittance that God is right, you are a sinner. It is an act of worship to confess your sins because God delights in truthfulness of the heart, and will teach you the wisdom of God.

Therefore come before God as His true children, petitioning your true Father, praising Him, and receiving from Him His loving discipline and correction. Then you who are priests in the kingdom of God will offer acceptable sacrifices to God. Not atoning sacrifices to pay for sin and make satisfaction for sin, but sacrifices of thanksgiving. Such are your prayers and supplications, your hymns and spiritual songs, your adoration and praise, and your reception of Holy Communion. For what greater way is there to thank God for all His benefits to you but by receiving from His hand what He freely offers and encourages you to have for your betterment?

That is why the Sacrament is called the Eucharist. It means thanksgiving. You take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord in thanksgiving for all His benefits to you of both body and soul. You don't participate in the body of Christ and drink His blood to atone for your sins or to make satisfaction for your sins. You participate in His body and blood because *He* has atoned for and made satisfaction for your sins. And He invites you to participate in His gift of life and salvation. In repentant joy you receive His all-availing sacrifice of His body and blood on the cross. In repentant joy means that by receiving His gift, His flesh and blood, you are giving thanks to Him for the benefits He bestows upon you in His name according to His good will.

Everyday is the Day of Thanksgiving for those who put their trust in the Lord. For the Lord disciplines those He loves. Call upon the name of the Lord in the day of trouble, and He will deliver you. Give thanks to God for He has created you, redeemed you, sanctified you, and keeps you with Christ Jesus in the one true faith until He gathers you to Himself where you will live and reign with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠