

## So Much to be Thankful For

Here's hoping you and your loved ones have a wonderful Thanksgiving later this week.

Though we have a national day of thanksgiving to God, really every day there are so many things to be thankful for. While we have petitionary prayer, and it's common to pray daily for our needs, a good thing to also do is try to find things we are thankful to thank God for them, for every day, I can think of blessings large and small: Emmett coming up to meet me; talking to my mom and dad on the phone; the blessing of another day of life; an eagle flying in the sky...the list goes on and on.

There is no getting around life is hard. But we should also thank God too. Sometimes it's easier to focus on what we don't have than what we do have. And while I certainly wouldn't mind winning the lottery, in a sense I've already won it in so many ways.

This time of year gives us a chance to look at what to be thankful for. And as I do that, here's a few of the things that I'm grateful for as I think about both this past year and my life in general.

**Life.** Every day is a gift.

**Family and friends.** I've been blessed with parents who have been with me always and taught me so much: a great sister and brother in law; wonderful grandparents who now pray for me in heaven and who I know I'll meet up with again; and, for the past 7 years a wonderful nephew. A joy of each day is being able to talk to my parents on the phone and see them regularly; like many of us during the height of the pandemic we weren't really visiting in person, so actually being together and sharing a Thanksgiving meal this year will be really meaningful. While seminary taught me so much about the faith, my parents have done so much to teach me about the faith in action. It's also so great to have a wonderful network of friends who also bring me closer to God.

**Furry friends.** Certainly part of family too! Being blessed with Kirby and now Emmett is so wonderful. The unconditional love, the joy they have for being around others, and the happiness they bring is beyond words. Both wonderful dogs that have made me better as a man and a priest.

**The Parish.** I really love being here at Saint Joe's, and as I shared last week when I did a pitch for our currently open positions, I'm surrounded by so many great people who give selflessly of their time and talent to make our parish thrive. We have so much going on in our parish and school that happens because of their dedication. It's so uplifting to be in a parish where people work so well together. Over the past year and a half in particular during the pandemic, our parish staff and teachers have done so much to keep our parish going. From our staff to parishioners, it's a truly great environment to be in, and I'm so thankful the archbishop renewed me for another 6 year term.

**Front Line Workers.** The pandemic has been hard on everyone, but from its earliest days one thing hasn't changed: the dedication and selflessness of police, firefighters, paramedics, doctors and nurses who have had to deal with many challenging situations putting themselves at risk to keep us safe. For police in particular, who have faced so much stress and hostility from some segments of the culture and media, yet put on a badge every day and would without hesitation help a person who hated them, I am so thankful for all they do in these trying times.

**Doctors, Scientists and Researchers.** Many have worked hard to come up with vaccines and treatments for Covid. Back in February I received my first shot; in March a second; and in October I received a booster. Covid is still with us, but researchers have worked around the clock to come up with treatments to help us co-exist with it as best we can. I'm so thankful for all the hard work that goes into both combatting Covid, but for the scientists who help us in so many ways.

**Simple joys of nature.** About 14 years ago I really got into photography. My first "photo shoot" was taking my new camera at the time and going for a walk on a winter's day in Medina at the regional park. None of the photos were keepers, but what I remember that day was taking the time to enjoy the sunset, look at an old barn, and enjoy the quietness of being in nature. Since that time I've taken to bird, wildlife and landscape photography and getting outside as much as I can. The point is there's so much around us to enjoy. So take time to enjoy it.

**My priesthood.** The joys of being a priest are you are with people at their best and worst moments. Like any vocation it has ups and downs, but I go to bed each day at peace, content and fulfilled. The people I serve also serve me by making me a better person and helping me to grow. I learn so much from coworkers and people in the parish. And I hope I've been able to help people too on their spiritual journeys. It's a wonderful feeling when you know inside you've discovered what you were called to do with your life and have a vocation that brings you such joy.

**Freedom.** I'm so blessed to be an American. Our founders realized our freedoms were given to us by God, not by a government. Over the past year and half though, we've had to think about the importance of freedom. When the pandemic again, there were a flurry of mandates and closures. Some were appropriate and done in the name of safety; but many were done arbitrarily by one branch of government. As we learned to live with Covid, we've also had to ask questions about these policies, such as why should a house of worship be forced to shut down, yet an alcohol or tobacco store or abortion clinic be deemed essential? Though the "lockdowns" in our country are largely behind us, I'm thankful for those who have been voices arguing for freedom. For instance, our archbishop in May of 2020 was willing to boldly defend our right to worship when churches were to be shuttered for the summer. President Ronald Reagan said ***"Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United***

**States where men were free.”** How true this is. Our nation faces enemies, but also those who would seduce us into surrendering our rights. We always need to be on guard and remember freedom is so important; to assemble, speak our minds, and to worship. As Christians, we also need to strive to help people to become truly free, including ourselves. Freedom isn't about doing what we want when we want; rather it's about not being enslaved to things like sensualism, ego, power, etc.

**Debate and Dissent.** One of the problems we face is that these days everyone seems to think they are right and people are losing the ability to argue. I've been greatly concerned by what I've seen in terms of censorship on social media, and "groupthink" in terms of policies on Covid. However whether we are talking about Covid or other issues, discussion and debate matters. The US Bishops for instance just wrapped up their conference where they are talking about various Church issues together. We have a parish council and finance council to talk about parish matters. It's important we don't live in echo chambers, but talk with those we may disagree to hear their point of view, and try to find compromise where appropriate. We don't want to be in situations where he who shouts the loudest or has political power at the current time stifles all debate. Finding the best solution requires thinking and discussion and recognizing we are many parts, but all one body.

**God's Presence in my Life.** As is often overheard at Saint Joe's school, the saying "God is good, all the time!" Most importantly looking at all I've been given, I'm thankful for God. As I shared in my homily last week, we need God guiding our "spiritual GPS" as I put it. Sometimes like all of us I get sidetracked, but God is always there to forgive, to love, and to help me become the person I know I can become. He's blessed me with so much in my life. Try to think of all that He is given you, and come to know Him - because He loves you and me more than we can ever imagine.

Many Blessings to you and your family this Thanksgiving!

Fr. Paul