Corrie and Betsie ten Boom were courageous, compassionate Dutch Christians who helped harbor Jews from the Nazis in Holland during World War 2. After the sisters were arrested for doing so, they were imprisoned at Ravensbruck, a German concentration camp.

In their barracks, they were shown to a series of massive square platforms, stacked three levels high and placed so close together that people had to walk single-file to pass between them. Rancid straw was scattered over the platforms, which served as communal beds for hundreds of women. Corrie and Betsie found they could not sit upright on their own platform without hitting their heads on the deck above them. They lay back, struggling against nausea that swept over them from the reeking straw.

Suddenly Corrie started up, striking her head on the cross-slats above. Something had bitten her leg. “Fleas!” she cried. “Betsie, the place is swarming with them!” Descending from the platform and edging down a narrow aisle, they made their way to a patch of light. “Here! And here another one!” Corrie wailed. “Betsie, how can we live in such a place?”

“Show us. Show us how,” Betsie said matter-of-factly. It took Corrie a moment to realize that her sister was praying. “Corrie!” Betsie then exclaimed excitedly. “He’s given us the answer! Before we asked, as He always does! In the Bible this morning. Where was it? Read that part again!”

Corrie checked to make sure no guards were nearby, then drew from a pouch a small Bible she had managed to smuggle into the concentration camp. “It was in First Thessalonians,” she said, finding the passage in the feeble light. “Here it is: ‘Comfort the frightened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus …’ ” (1 Thessalonians 5:14-18).

“That’s it!” Betsie interrupted. “That’s His answer. ‘Give thanks in all circumstances! ’

That’s what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this barracks!”

Corrie stared at her incredulously, then around at the dark, foul-smelling room. “Such as?” she inquired.

“Such as being assigned here together.”

Corrie bit her lip. “Oh yes, Lord Jesus!”

“Such as what you’re holding in your hands.”
Corrie looked down at the Bible. “Yes! Thank You, dear Lord, that there was no inspection when we entered here! Thank You for all the women, here in this room, who will meet You in these pages.”

“Yes,” agreed Betsie. “Thank You for the very crowding here. Since we’re packed so close, that many more will hear!” She looked at her sister expectantly and prodded,

“Corrie!”

“Oh, all right. Thank You for the jammed, crammed, stuffed, packed, suffocating crowds.”

“Thank you,” Betsie continued on serenely, “for the fleas and for …”

That was too much for Corrie. She cut in on her sister: “Betsie, there’s no way even God can make me grateful for a flea.”

‘ “Give thanks in all circumstances,” Betsie corrected. “It doesn’t say, ‘in pleasant circumstances. ’Fleas are part of this place where God has put us.” So they stood between the stacks of bunks and gave thanks for fleas, though on that occasion Corrie thought Betsie was surely wrong.

As the weeks passed, Betsie’s health weakened to the point that, rather than needing to go out on work duty each day, she was permitted to remain in the barracks and knit socks together with other seriously-ill prisoners. She was a lightning fast knitter and usually had her daily sock quota completed by noon. As a result, she had hours each day she could spend moving from platform to platform reading the Bible to fellow prisoners. She

was able to do this undetected as the guards never seemed to venture far into the barracks.

One evening when Corrie arrived back at the barracks Betsie's eyes were twinkling.

"You're looking extraordinarily pleased with yourself," Corrie told her.

"You know we've never understood why we had so much freedom in the big room," Betsie said, referring to the part of the barracks where the sleeping platforms were. "Well—I've found out. This afternoon there was confusion in my knitting group about sock sizes, so we asked the supervisor to come and settle it. But she wouldn't. She wouldn't step through the door and neither would the guards. And you know why?" Betsie could not keep the triumph from her voice as she exclaimed, "Because of the fleas! That's what she said: 'That place is crawling with fleas!" '

Corrie's mind raced back to their first hour in the barracks. She remembered Betsie bowing her head and thanking God for creatures that Corrie could see no use for.

Life is at times very hard; God does not will evil, but it is allowed to happen. But in this, there is always hope and love; God standing with us, but also using us, as he did Corrie and Betsie, to be agents of hope.

As Saint Paul says in the second reading, “God is faithful.” And in the Gospel, God cures the lepers. He is there for us always. And He has blessed us so much. So the challenge for us all is to open our eyes to that, and know that God is with us always and to show thanks not just one day a year, but always. Gratitude needs to be a way of life.

Sometimes it is easy to get angry at God for things that go wrong in our lives. The reality is sometimes horrible things happen. But what we must remember is that God did not chose to abandon us, but to love, time and time again. He chose to be one of us; to suffer as one of us; to die as one of us; to grieve as one of us; to be with us and experience every emotion we go through, all because He loves us so much. So what we need to always remember is that no matter what life throws at us, the Cross is God’s statement that we are never alone. We can’t make it through life

alone but need to turn to God and reach out to Him and trust in Him, remembering God will be with us to the end.

With that, we also must rely on God but try to also see what he has blessed us with. Admittedly I don't think I would ever give thanks for fleas. And there's things I daydream about like most people. And there have been challenges in my life and priesthood just as there have been in your vocations too. But as I pray, I also try to make sure I give thanks to the good Lord for what He has given me. All of our lives have so many joys, so while petitionary prayer is all well and fine, hopefully we also give thanks to God for the simple blessings of each day.

Lastly, as you have dinner later with loved ones, don't forget to give thanks to God for people too, and to remember that as we break bread at the dinner table but also at this altar, God puts us in communion with one another for a reason. We need one another. Judy had to ask for help. And we do too, whether it's a health situation, or asking parents for advice, or opening up about something we are battling spiritually or struggling with morally in choosing the right, we need people to help us find the way to

heaven. So be that person for others, and remember that asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength.

An anonymous author once said: “We have no right to ask, when sorrow comes, ‘why did this happen to me, ’unless we ask the same question for every moment of happiness that comes our way.” Let’s make sure we don’t just focus on the happiness one day of the year when we gather for turkey, but every day when we look at our kids, our families, when we go to work, when we sit down to dinner, and recognize that no matter what may be in our savings account or investment portfolio, we truly have been given so much.