

Session 3: GIVING THANKS

1. Richard Rohr says, *"The only person who prays well is one who prays often."*
2. The only 'success' – if you can even apply that word in the context of prayer – is in sticking to it, keeping with it, seeking to be one who "prays without ceasing."
3. I can see from reading your answers to the questionnaire that for most of you, prayer is not just a "once a day" activity. You pray many times a day, not always formally, or ritually, or with words. But you turn your face to God, so to speak. You offer God your work, your time, your heart, and your silence. (Offering God your silence is very important! Just "sitting with God" can be beautiful.)
4. In the same place where he says, *"Pray without ceasing,"* Paul also says, "GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." [1 Thess. 5:17-19]
5. In Ephesians 5:19-20, it says *"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ALWAYS GIVING THANKS to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."*
6. If you read the New Testament, paying attention to the prayers that are there, and the references to prayer, you'll see how often *giving thanks* figures prominently.
7. It has been my experience as a priest that when we provide an opportunity in the liturgy, in the Prayers of the People, for the congregation to offer intercessions for the sick or people in need, and we insert a moment of silence in the prayer during which people can call out names, there will almost always be some names or circumstances lifted up.

But, if at the same time we also provide an opportunity for people to offer their own thanksgivings, there are rarely any thanksgivings spoken.

Why do you think that is? —What is going on? Are people bashful about naming aloud, "in public," the things or the people that they're thankful for? What is the inhibition?

8. I'd be interested in hearing how you incorporate giving thanks in your own prayers. When do you feel moved to offer thanks?
9. Out here in the mountains, where we are surrounded by natural beauty, giving thanks seems to be the most obvious way to pray! I would expect that people who tell us they "can worship on the ski slopes better than in church" are thinking about their gratitude for nature, for our surroundings – for the peaks and valleys and rivers and the blue Colorado sky. —Right?
10. Speaking of my own prayer life, I have a profound consciousness of having received God's love as a gift. All I can say in return is "thank you."

Sometimes I say, or think, "But why *me*?" There's never an answer to that. God loves each of us just because we're his own children.

I know that the love of God that has been poured into my heart was a gift, not something I earned or deserved. So I feel immensely blessed. And, feeling blessed, I find myself compelled to repeat my thanksgiving to God over and over in my "word prayers," in my journal.

11. I want to propose an exercise to you. I have paper and pens for each of you to use. And what I'd like you to do is this: address yourself to God, using whatever words seem spontaneous to you, like "O, God," or "Dear heavenly Father," and then just start writing down what you're thankful for!

12. We're going to do this for FIVE minutes. That can seem like an eternity in a setting like this. And here's the challenge: I want you to keep writing the whole time!

Don't stop. Spend all five minutes just listing what you're thankful for. And you are doing this only for God. I don't want you to give these papers to me when you're done, or share them with anyone else. What you say is private, between you and the Lord. But I DO want you to keep writing for the full five minutes!

If that sounds hard, let me remind you that most of you have been alive for a long time. Not everything you are thankful for happened yesterday, or last week, or even within the last ten years! If you feel as if your stream of thanksgivings is turning to a trickle, go back to your childhood, back to your memories: the special people in your life who were gifts from God, the events that were spiritual turning points, the "aha moments," and the "mountains of Transfiguration."

And since no one else is going to critique (or even read) your list, you can be totally honest, totally vulnerable. Your husband or wife (...or father or mother ...or rector) is not going to point at something on your list and say, "You're thankful for THAT? And why didn't you mention _____?"

I assure you: there is plenty of raw material for thanksgiving in *every* life!

Any questions? *OK, let's do it!*

[Time 5 min. with stopwatch.]

13. Anybody want to comment on what we just did? How did it feel?
14. Once a year or two ago I decided that I would take a week and not offer any kind of prayers to God except prayers of thanksgivings. My journaling every day was just a business of saying, "Thank you God for ____." "Thank you for ____." "Thank you that ____ happened." *Etc., etc.*
- It turned out to be a huge "spiritual pleasure". It was a joy. It opened my eyes in a very practical way to what God had been doing in my life for years and years and years.
- And, yes, I repeated myself. Each day's list was somewhat different, but I came back again and again to a number of things. And that's o.k.
- "Eucharist" means "thanksgiving." Thanksgiving is the heart of Christian worship, and what we're thankful for, over and over and over – down 2,000 years of shared Christian experience – is always the same thing: God's gift, God's love for us that is disclosed in the incarnation, life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of His Son.
- So, repetition is o.k. And I sometimes felt motivated to tell God WHY I was thankful for this or that. Though, of course, I knew that *He* already knew. —But it was important for me to make the connection in my own mind as I prayed.
- I have not set myself the assignment of ONLY offering thanksgivings for a week again, since that time. But somehow that week "primed the pump" and made my stream of thanksgivings flow more freely.
- So I recommend it to you! Give it a try.