

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This week, as you know, we celebrate Thanksgiving. It seems to have come up so early this year! Yet, all year round, God calls us to be thankful! Last Saturday, we had a Ministry Volunteer Appreciation Dinner here at St. Patrick. As I looked around the Parish Center, I was moved with such gratitude for all that so many people have contributed to St. Patrick Parish, the spreading of the Gospel, and care for the “little ones” of God. It truly touched me.

Gratitude, thankfulness, is at the heart of our faith. The Church teaches that the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of our faith, and everything in our lives. *Eucharist* comes from the Greek word that means “Thanksgiving.” The Eucharist is the infinite thanksgiving that the Son (Jesus) gives eternally to His Father. At Mass, at Eucharist, we may participate in this.

I think about how *little* my gratitude is. Even on a human level, there are so many times that I’m focused on my own struggles, sufferings, troubles, etc., that I forget to give thanks to the people around me (hence, why I was so grateful for the people who organized the appreciation dinner . . . it gave me a chance to remember to be thankful for them, and verbalize it and act on it). God has done soooooooooooooo much more for us than any human has. First, God brought us into existence. We came from *nothing* into being, all by gift from God. He loved us into existence! Then, when we were far from Him, He came into our flesh, our humanity, to draw us close to Himself. He died a gruesome death on the cross to wash away our sins, and rose from the dead to destroy the power death has over us. All in all, when we were not worthy of it, God did everything to show us how much He loves us, and gives us eternal life with Him!

When I ponder over all of that, I realize that the “little” gratitude I have can barely scratch the surface of thanks I need to give to God. This is why I am so grateful for the Mass, the Eucharist – it is God’s thanksgiving to God. By His grace, we get to participate in that thanksgiving so that my little thanks can be made perfect and infinite to God!

Do you see this? The Church’s mandate to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days (founded on God’s word in Scripture – remember the 10 Commandments?!), is not a legalistic command, but one of love. God (and the Church) invites us to show our gratitude to God through the Mass, the Eucharist. When we miss Mass on these holy days (through our own fault), we say to God, “I don’t really need to thank you for all that you have done. I have better things to do with my time” . . . and God weeps. He knows that we only reach our full potential by getting outside of ourselves, not by turning in on self; and gratitude is one very important and necessary piece to do this.

Often, when we don’t “get anything out of Mass,” we begin to question whether we should be going or not. After all, there are so many other things that show how they can benefit us (like sleeping in on Sunday!). But Mass isn’t primarily about what we get, but what we give – giving thanks and adoration to God. As we genuinely try to enter in and participate in the infinite thanksgiving of the Eucharist, we find that (over time), we are changed: we become more generous, more loving, more . . . how God made us to be. It’s like exercise – it takes a while to see results, and may seem like we’re getting nowhere, but over time, we can see a gradual improvement in health and wellbeing.

So this week of Thanksgiving, let’s join in God’s incredible act of thanksgiving. And may the gratitude of Christ permeate our whole beings, drawing us out of ourselves and helping us to achieve our greatest potential.