



**2024 Thanksgiving Message of
Most Rev. Francis Leo
Metropolitan Archbishop of Toronto**

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

May Jesus and Mary be in your souls.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone in the Archdiocese of Toronto a Happy and Holy Thanksgiving, and to reflect on the importance of gratitude in our life of faith.

As an integral component of the cardinal virtue of justice - whereby we pay what is due to our benefactors - the virtue of gratitude is likewise related to, but distinguished from, the virtue of religion by which we pay what is due to God, as well as the virtue of piety (especially filial) by which we pay what is due to our parents and guardians. When all is said and done, we recognize and give thanks to God Himself as the source of all good things, all blessings and all graces, directing ultimately all our gratefulness principally to Him. In addition, and as a natural consequence, part of the debt we owe to the Lord is to be paid by honouring our parents and showing gratitude to those who do good to us. The beauty of this virtue is that it is intended to perfect our capacity for acknowledging the many and varied benefits we have received.

This weekend celebration naturally leads us to ask the questions: What am I thankful for in my life? What are the “good things” from which I benefit? Who are those men and women who are channels of God’s goodness to me and who witness to the goodness of the Lord calling forth my acknowledgment and gratitude? Sometimes we stop and recognize the blessings formally around the Thanksgiving table, with each person sharing what they are thankful for in their lives. At other times it is done informally with a kind word or simple sentiment of thanks.

I would encourage you to take time to consider this question in a more fulsome way. As a healthy and life-giving spiritual exercise, it is imperative to express what we are thankful for, on a daily basis. Why daily? It is crucial that we recognize the Lord in a such a way, as being the origin and font of all goodness, that all is grace, that we are daily recipients of His bounty and we are called to co-operate with His loving plan. The transformative choice and act of giving thanks involves a process of reflection, recognition and response. **Reflecting** on what is happening in our lives, in more than just a perfunctory way; **Recognizing** the gifts and goodness we have received are from God; and **Responding** by giving thanks and hopefully being willing to share our bounty with others. Reflecting, recognizing and responding is a spiritual exercise that will help us to grow in love and service of God and others.



More than a simple, pious and polite platitude calling people to say “Thank you”, the Church sees prayers of thanksgiving as fundamental to the very life and being of the Church. The highest prayer of thanksgiving which the Church offers is indeed the holy Eucharist. The word “eucharist” comes from the Greek *eucharistein* or *eulogein* meaning “thanksgiving.” When we celebrate the Eucharist, we recall God’s works of creation, redemption and sanctification and we give thanks (CCC 1328). The Catechism succinctly teaches: “Thanksgiving characterizes the prayer of the Church which, in celebrating the Eucharist, reveals and becomes more fully what she is” (CCC 2637). What does this mean? At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the sacrifice of the blessed Eucharist, offering praise and thanksgiving. His sacrifice on the Cross was the culmination and ultimate expression of his praise and thanksgiving to the Heavenly Father. This sacrifice of thanksgiving was done once and for all people, and when we celebrate the Eucharist, we unite ourselves to Jesus becoming sharers in His Body and Blood and forming a single Body - the Church. This is who we are and what we hope to become more fully.

Moreover, the Catechism, in describing the five forms of prayer, includes that of gratitude (CCC 2623-2649): (i) prayer of blessing or adoration, (ii) prayer of petition, (iii) prayer of intercession, (iv) prayer of thanksgiving, and (v) prayer of praise. We take note of how important giving thanks was to the Lord Jesus as an integral part of living in the Kingdom but also how Holy Mother Church emphasizes, teaches and promotes thanksgiving as an essential element of the life of prayer for all of Christ’s faithful.

The Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, teaches (*Summa Theologica*, II IIae, 106) that as far as possible, we ought to express our gratefulness to those who do good to us. However, the way and the extent to which we do so will naturally vary according to particular circumstances. As we know by experience, individuals may very well do us favours for a variety of reasons and at times with mixed motives. Nevertheless, we grow in the virtue of gratitude when we more willingly choose to see the good in people’s actions rather than the evil. And it is precisely for the good received that we show gratitude. In fact, gratitude urges us forward to be *gracious* in return to the good received and not simply *just*; that is, we endeavour, as much as possible, to repay *more* than what we have received, going beyond strict justice into the realm of true generosity and striking magnanimity.

May God bless you and your family and friends, your community and loved ones on this Thanksgiving weekend. Know that I give thanks to God for all of you, for the wonderful People that make up the Archdiocese of Toronto and I am grateful for all that you do to show the Face of Christ in new and life-giving ways to those the Lord providentially places on our path.

Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, pray for us and make us truly gratitude by God’s grace.