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## PASTORAL LETTER – NOVEMBER 2021

Dear siblings in Christ,

This year's Thanksgiving celebration will likely have a deeper appreciation and deeper meaning for many of us. After celebrating Thanksgiving differently last year due to the restrictions caused by the pandemic, many of us are looking forward to traveling and gathering with family and friends.

Personally speaking, I am looking forward to eating mom's enchanted recipes (after my failed attempts to make her recipe last year). I am looking forward to watching part of the annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and watching a football game or two in the company of family and friends. It didn't feel the same last year discussing or arguing the fine points of football over Zoom.

So, when I close my eyes around the Thanksgiving table this year, I will no longer take the little things for granted. I will express my gratitude for many things, including the blessing of living in a country where science and technology thrive. The harrowing images on social media of scores of bodies that continue to pile up in public place in other countries, due to the lack of vaccine access, is heartbreaking. Also, I will give my thanks for those relatives and friends whose quirks and politics I don't understand, and I will be grateful for their place in my life. I missed being with them last year.

What will you be grateful for this year around the Thanksgiving table?

Gratitude is one of the hallmarks of the Christian faith and the Reformed faith. It is both a virtue, meaning that it is a behavior that can be learned and worked on, and a spiritual attitude, meaning that it is a choice. Gratitude, fundamentally speaking, comes from the Latin word *gratus*: "pleasing, thankful." It is a feeling of appreciation felt by and/or similar positive response shown by the recipient of kindness.

The thing about gratitude is that we are called as Christians to express it, irrespective of our privations. God knows that we have had our share of troubles and tribulations as a society over the past two years; the ongoing political quarrels over the pandemic, surging gas prices, and barren store shelves may make many of us feel like we don't have much to be thankful for.

But gratitude involves taking personal stock and expressing a sense of contentment for what we have versus what we don't have. Perhaps this is what Charles Dickens had in mind when he said, ***“Reflect upon your present blessings—of which every man has many—not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some.”***

If Dickens' words do not convince you or persuade you to be grateful amid your troubles or our nation's troubles, consider the words of Paul, who said in Colossians 1: ***“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints...”***

Paul demonstrates that one of the ways in which he was able to remain embedded in gratitude and to have a good attitude about life was by taking time to pray for others. Paul specifically prayed for the people who made it possible for him to exercise his ministry through their financial, moral, and spiritual support. Had Paul complained about his congregants in Colossae, he would have had a relationship marked by bitterness and strife.

Paul has a lot to teach us with his example. He teaches us that we cannot build a relationship on complaints, but on gratitude. Also, Paul teaches us that if we spend more time in prayer for the people who make it possible for us to do what we love to do, it is possible that unfavorable circumstances will change. Perhaps our perspective of them will change? Perhaps our relationship with them will be healthier? Perhaps we will carry our lives with more joy, and exercise our vocation with more happiness?

Paul offers prayer as a way of developing our sense of gratitude. But there are other ways. In an article in *The New York Times*, an author who wrote about the subject of gratitude suggests “taking a gratitude photo.” The rationale? The visual image will invite the person who took the photo and those who view the photo to appreciate the world around them, and it can help those who view the photo from sliding back into the complacency they held prior to the pandemic about people, places, and things. Most of us own a phone with a camera feature, so this is something that sounds like a fun and doable way to help us grow in our gratitude—with the added bonus that it may either impress or help us connect with a younger generation around the Thanksgiving table when we get to share and show what we are grateful for.

So, as you gather to celebrate Thanksgiving, what are you grateful for? If you wish to share, send me an email at [dominieperez@gmail.com](mailto:dominieperez@gmail.com)

May you have a safe and blessed Thanksgiving!

Pastor Luis

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