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Morning Prayer – Tuesday, March 1, 2016

“Contemplating the Dawn of a New Day”

One of my favorite books from childhood is *Winnie the Pooh*.¹ There’s this very endearing scene where Pooh Bear is walking down a path accompanied by his little friend, Piglet. Pooh asks Piglet, “What day is it?” Piglet answers, “It’s today.” And Pooh responds, “My favorite day”

This is your best day yet. One particular practice in life that will absolutely, positively transform your life is gratitude. Live your life as a gift, not as a given. Be grateful. Gratitude transforms life; it’s a eucharistic action. The reason we celebrate the Holy Eucharist today at midday is not to lift us out of the mundane into a divine place, then to set us back down into normal life. No. It is not that. It’s the very opposite. We celebrate the Holy Eucharist as a living reminder of how to live life all the time: eucharistically. Gratitude consecrates life and makes it all real. Makes *you* real.

When I say we should live gratefully, I’m not suggesting to sugarcoat things for which we are not grateful. That would be pretending, and pretending is not real. But I *am* encouraging you to live with gratitude for everything you could otherwise take for granted. Living gratefully will rebalance the scale of your life. You will get in touch with the weightiness of wonder, and it will absolutely transform your life.

If you are out of practice in living gratefully, here’s what I’d suggest. Start now:

- If you are able just now to breathe without mechanical assistance, be grateful.
- If you are able just now to sit upright in your chair, without having to be strapped in, be grateful.
- If you are able just now to imagine rising from your seat without someone’s assistance, if you could indeed stand up and claim your balance, be grateful.
- If you can walk – the miracle coordination of your feet, and knees, and hips – be grateful.
- If, in the morning, you have the muscular coordination to turn off your alarm clock, be grateful.
- If you have a bed beside your alarm clock, a bed with clean sheets and covers and a pillow, a bed where you may rest safely, a bed in a room near a bathroom, a bathroom with a sink, a sink with potable water, potable cold *and* hot water, where you have a glass, and the muscular coordination to fill that glass with this water, and draw that glass to your lips, and take a drink which you are able to swallow...
- If you have the gift of touch, and taste, and sight, and smell, and hearing the myriad of things and creatures and people... be grateful.

On I could go. On *you* could go... and you should! Living gratefully is a way of praying without ceasing. That is the very recommendation of St. Paul. He writes in his First Letter to the

Thessalonians: *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

Live your life gratefully:

- Be grateful for yourself. You are a walking miracle. If they only knew... But *you* know. Cherish yourself. Be kind to yourself. Be grateful for yourself. You are the best you’ve got. In the morning, wink at yourself in the mirror.
- Be grateful to God for your life’s terms. Your life is probably not altogether what you expected. Many of us have woken up some morning and discovered that the script we’ve been handed in the play of life is not the part we thought we were trying out for. Be grateful to God for the gift of life that God has shared with you and on God’s terms. Be grateful to God that God thinks you’re up to living your life. Be grateful for the miracle of your life, not the life you could have had or think you should have but the life you’ve been given. That’s the only place you’ll find life.
- Express your gratitude to others. Keep gratitude in mind, especially for those who are “down and out” *and* for those who are “up and out.” All of you here are in both of these categories, one way or another. And both categories of people – the “down and out” *and* “up and out” – are under-thanked. Say “thank you.” Say it often. Thanking people will change their day, and it will probably change their life.

I came back from New York City to Boston on an Amtrak train. I happened to be walking up the train platform towards the station at the same time as the train engineer came climbing down the ladder from engine. A big guy, portly, flannel shirt, suspenders, grease on his face. We ended up walking side-by-side toward the station house. I turned to him and said, “Thanks for the great ride.” The engineer turned to me in a kind of threatening voice and shouted, “What did you say?!” There was lots of noise in the train station – trains arriving and departing, brakes hissing, lots of movement – and so I picked up my voice and said to him that I had gotten on the train at Penn Station and ridden back to Boston with him. And I told him again, “Thanks for the great ride.” Well this big burly man stops dead in his tracks and he turns to me, now with some tears in his eyes, and said, “I’ve been driving these trains for almost thirty years and *no one* has ever thanked me.” Well, now I’ve got tears in my eyes, too. He shouldn’t have to wait 30 years to be thanked. No one should.

- At Easter, when we renew our baptismal covenant, we pledge “to respect the dignity of every human being.” For many people, we have to give them dignity first. They have no dignity in-and-of themselves. It was not given to them as a birthright, or it’s been robbed from them. We must give them dignity so that there’s dignity to respect by us, by others, by the person him or herself. Thanking people is dignifying, and it is so transformative.
- Remember the cousin to “thank you.” And that is, “You are welcome.” When people thank you – and some people will need to thank you – give them the courtesy of the response, “You are welcome.” Don’t apologize for yourself, don’t make an excuse for your substandard performance, don’t say, “No problem.” Say, “You are welcome,” and

mean it from the bottom of your heart. “You are welcome.” You are welcome to what I have shared with you, and there is more where that came from... out of a great reservoir of grace. You are welcome.

Thanking people is a eucharistic action, and it is as transformative as the prayer of thanksgiving we pray over bread and wine at the altar. The experience of gratitude is deep encouragement. The experience of gratitude will transform even the broken heart or hard heart and make it whole and hopeful.

If you are living in arrears in terms of gratitude, if you haven’t claimed gratitude for all the good of your life – the good that is now, the good that has brought you to this place in life, the countless interventions of goodness that have enabled you to live your life up to this moment – if you are in arrears in gratitude, you’re going to be blown away in the best of ways by getting in touch with the miracle of your life. Gratitude is a terrific lenten discipline. (It’s great in Eastertide, and Pentecost, and beyond.) Today is predicted to be a day of wonder for you, with the promise of God’s presence and God’s provision and God’s power. Begin your day, contemplate your day, every day, with gratitude. Gratitude absolutely transforms.

The psalmist prays:

“*This* is the day that the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice in be glad in it.”ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Winnie-the-Pooh, a fictional anthropomorphic teddy bear created by A. A. Milne, first published in 1926.

ⁱⁱ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

ⁱⁱⁱ Psalm 118:24.