



Grace in All Things

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

Recently I have been wondering if my efforts make a difference. The thoughts aren't prompted by self-pity but are attempts to try and recognize the power of God at work in the world. I say they're attempts to try and recognize God's power at work in the world because I understand my efforts as one of the many manifestations of God's love. I know I occasionally play a small part in the lived reality of God's grace, as does each reader of this newsletter.

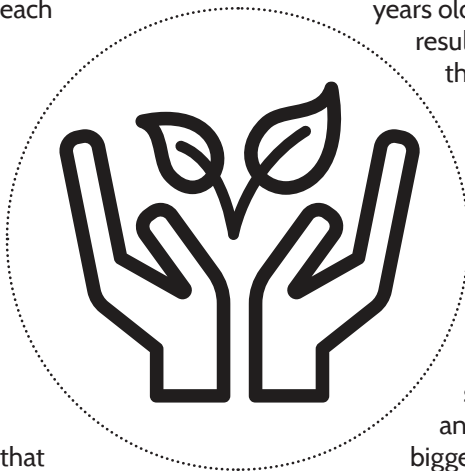
This perspective is theologically grounded and based on the conviction that we are instruments of God's grace and blessing. Without our efforts and our generous response to the power of grace, it would be difficult to recognize the power of God at work. However, this point of view doesn't mean there are no questions. A lively faith is one that often includes questions and doubts. Not the unrelenting and oftentimes unsettling questions and doubts prompted by scrupulosity, but questions and doubts nonetheless.

Of course, my ponderings may result more from being tired or unfocused, common human

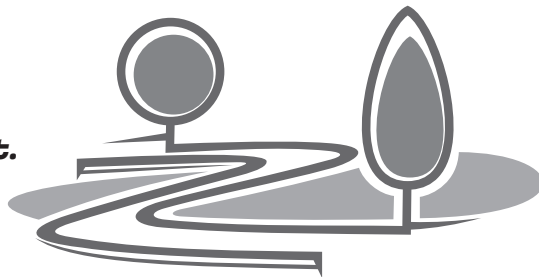
experiences. Importantly, my perspective is, in part, an outgrowth of some significant experiences and events I've witnessed that at first glance seemed unrelated. But they have invited me to at least wonder about each event's meaning and to try to place each one into a helpful perspective.

For example, I recently celebrated the funeral Mass of a young woman who was only twenty years old when she died. Her death resulted from a convergence of the effects of a lingering illness and a bubble bath. While enjoying a relaxing bath, she unexpectedly had a grand mal seizure. The seizure caused her to drown in the tub. Many young men and women attended her funeral liturgy. My task was to provide them with some sense of purpose and to try and place the experience into a bigger picture that was somehow informed by faith.

A second example. I was called into a hospice room at a local nursing home to anoint a woman who was close to death. Her death was no surprise. She had lived a long life and had come to the end of her journey. She was surrounded



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by family and friends, who said “she just could not let go.” We didn’t know what she was waiting for since she was unable to speak. But after celebrating the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, she seemed visibly relaxed and very much at peace. Perhaps this sacrament was what she was waiting for in order to continue her journey.

A final example of what was at the source of my pondering and wonderment was the suicide of a friend from my past with whom I had lived and worked. He was suffering from depression, and even though he was doing all he could to fight the illness, he succumbed and achieved his peace, not in the life we all hoped he’d enjoy, but rather only in the death that came unannounced and unwanted. In this instance there was nothing I could do but pray, remember, and give thanks.

We are all people of faith. This is all the more important to reflect upon and understand as

you read this newsletter. Men and women who struggle with scrupulosity are some of the most faith-filled people I’ve encountered. Despite our faith, however, there are moments when we struggle to see the will of God and the blessings of God in our midst. This is not a description of sin. This is not a description of faithlessness. This is a description of what it means to be a human being. All of us have moments when life seems focused, clear, and filled with meaning. On the other hand, there are days in which we experience the exact opposite. It’s all part of the adventure of life, the fullness of what it means to be a child of God.

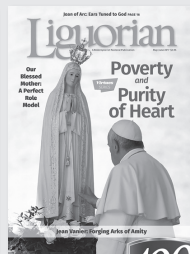
I understand that I will continue to ponder and wonder. And whether we go a hard way or an easy way, it is all grace. I just need to learn and practice more and more each day a sense of gratefulness to our Creator. ✨

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Living Thanksgiving Every Day

FR. JOHN BARTUNEK, LC

The Thanksgiving holiday affords us, both as individuals and as a society, a chance to turn our attention away from the self-focused worries that tend to dominate our consciousness. Instead, we spend a day thinking about the rest of the world and how many good things we have received through the goodness of God's providence and the generosity of those who care for us. Gratitude opens our hearts and minds, refreshing them both and curing, or at least giving us a respite from, egoism.

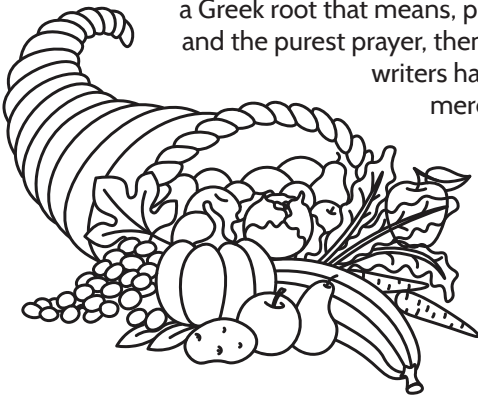
The most successful businessman and the most brilliant politician usually rise to their positions on the tide of personal talent and through many influences beyond their control: an attentive teacher, a generous mentor, a happy coincidence, a serendipitous opportunity, a lesson learned in an unplanned circumstance. The self-made man is a myth. Even those who strive most for success only achieve it with the aid of others.

This is why the images of Thanksgiving spark joy as well as humility: the cornucopia overflowing with fruits of the earth, the fallen leaves with their glorious but fading colors, the community of extended family and friends gathered around a feast-filled table. All that we have and enjoy comes from a combination of our own smarts and strengths and a whole network of people and factors far beyond our control.

No one understood the importance of gratitude more than Jesus. The Gospels often show him giving thanks to his Father: for example, before the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, after his disciples came back from their first mission, and during the Last Supper. He himself was moved to praise the virtue of gratitude when only one of the ten lepers he cleansed returned to give him thanks, even while he felt the pain of the other nine's ingratitude. Jesus knows that an ungrateful heart is a closed heart, and a closed heart cannot receive the love and grace that give meaning to our lives.

In the Catholic tradition, the Mass, our central act of worship and the most perfect prayer, is called the celebration of the Eucharist. It's an interesting word. It comes from a Greek root that means, precisely, "Thanksgiving." The highest act of worship and the purest prayer, then, is that of gratitude. Here is what some spiritual writers have called the shortcut to holiness, and holiness is merely another name for true, lasting happiness.

Why not test whether gratitude really is the shortcut to holiness? Why not live the spirit of Thanksgiving every day, instead of only once a year, just to see what happens? I guarantee you won't be disappointed. ✨



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Q. *I believe I have scrupulosity. I want to try and conquer/treat/cope with it on my own and not seek out a priest-confessor to guide/help me with it. I imagine that not doing so would not necessarily be the best practice, but I would specifically like to know if not doing so would be sinful.*

A. No, it would not be sinful. Your mental health and your commitment to become a more healthy person is a deeply personal struggle. At times, even with help and direction, you will feel very much alone. I would just hope that as you work on this issue that you remain open to the grace of God and the possibility of help and assistance from people who care for you when the need arises.

Q. *I suffer from blasphemous thoughts about God and the Blessed Mother. I don't want these thoughts, and they horrify me. But they keep occurring, particularly when I'm trying to pray. Did I cause these thoughts to occur? Have I committed a mortal sin?*

A. No. You aren't committing mortal sin or any kind of sin. You didn't cause these thoughts to happen. Unfortunately, this is one of the manifestations of a certain kind of scrupulosity and OCD. That's the cruelty of the disorder, it strikes at the very heart of what you hold dear and valuable, in this instance your love and devotion for God and his Blessed Mother. When you have these thoughts, it's not because you *don't* love but because you *do* love.



I would just hope that as you work on this issue that you remain open to the grace of God and the possibility of help and assistance from people who care for you when the need arises.



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