

National Day of Thanksgiving
Catechetical Instruction

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.” Five times the Psalmist wrote those words (Psalms 106:1; 107:1, 118:1; 118:29; 136:1), adding an additional, “Oh give thanks to the LORD.” (Psalm 105:1) Then, there are countless other passages of scripture that command or encourage thankfulness or demonstrate thankfulness for the reader and hearer, including those which were read today.

Then we have the instructions from Dr. Luther’s Small Catechism, as you recited this morning. I believe that God has made me, given me everything that I have, and defends me from all dangers, “for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him.” God gives daily bread to all without our prayer—everything that is needed to support body and life—“but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to know it, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.”

It should be clear that every last little thing that you have, that fact that you live and move and breathe and have your being, is all given to you by your Father in heaven. What’s more, He desires your thanks for it. It is your duty to thank God for His gifts: body and soul, eyes, ears, and all of your members, your reason and senses, clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all of your goods; defense against all danger, guarding and protecting from all evil; pious and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors...and the list could go on.

And as He gives these things to you daily—every moment of every day—it should follow that your thanks for His benefits should be daily, as well. It’s good to set apart a day, like today, to thank and praise God for all of His benefits, even if in remembrance of some of the first European settlers on this land, but doing so this day should not preclude thanking your Father in heaven any other day of the week or any other moment of the day—including as your slumber in your comfortable chair with a belly full of turkey later today.

But how do you hear this? This is the law: “Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!” How do you hear it?

Well, first of all, it is instruction. And the instruction is this: Don’t think too highly of yourself, that you are able to provide everything that you need for yourself, much less anything from among everything that you have. Furthermore, He that has provided you with all that you have is the only, true God, Father of all Creation, in His Son and Spirit. This He does simply and purely out of His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in you. For this, you should be thanking Him.

Second, it is a mirror that shows you what you lack. For one thing, you are not worthy of your heavenly Father’s goodness, nor have you merited it. More importantly, however, having now been instructed that you have all that you do solely from God, and purely out of His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, it shows you your lack of thankfulness. God has given you all that you have—everything—and aside from today (even on today), have you thanked Him for any of it? Do you make a regular habit of thanking God for anything? Or do you do so only when you are reminded of His goodness? If you’re anything like the man in the pulpit, your daily thanksgiving is usually limited to thanking God for safely keeping you this day, as Dr. Luther instructs with his evening prayer (the counterpart to which we’ll pray later today), and that taking any time to thank God for everything doesn’t happen all that often.

Third, it is a statement that shows you exactly what the New Man in Christ—which you have by way of your Baptism into His death and resurrection—always does. The New Man, perhaps the greatest of God’s gifts to you, is the branch grafted onto the Vine of Jesus Christ. It produces good fruit—good works—among which is thanking God for all of His benefits to you. Do not misunderstand me, dear hearers, when we read and recite from the Small Catechism that we are to be thankful to God, it’s not

that the New Man in Christ *should* be doing these things, but that he most certainly does them.

Anytime you are not thankful when you ought to be, that is the Old Man having his way with you. And, as I said before, this happens more often than not.

That's why your Father in heaven gave you the greatest of His gifts—His Son, Jesus the Christ. In Christ, you are a new creation, baptized into His death and resurrection. As Dr. Luther teaches,

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His won, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

Furthermore,

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; by the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers, and will at the Last Day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

Here is the greatest of God's gifts to you: Jesus Christ, His death on the cross where He suffered the full wrath of God in your place, and the life you have in exchange on account of Jesus' merits. By His Spirit, you are brought here to receive this greatest of gifts: the forgiveness of your sins for the sake of Jesus Christ, apprehended by the faith which He has given you, and made your own, which sanctifies you—makes you holy as your Father in heaven is holy.

By the work of Jesus Christ and the grace of God, you are accounted worthy to receive all His benefits which He gives out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, even to all evil people. But especially to you, dear Baptized, because in baptism, you have received Jesus, the Son of God, and as St. John wrote, "...as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13) You are a son of God in Christ, by way of Baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection, whereby you have received the adoption of sons (cf. Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5)

What father, good or evil, does not give good gifts to his children? (cf. Luke 11:11-12) So much more, then your Father in heaven does to His dear children—you, dear Baptized. He gives you all that you need to support this body and life, all for which it is your duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. How much more, then, ought we to thank and praise God for the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:14)

"Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." YHWH is good, and His mercy does endure forever, regardless of your thanks, because you are His son and He is your heavenly Father. You are His son because you have been covered in the blood of Jesus, His only-begotten Son; there is no goodness greater, nor other mercy which endures forever. By the merit of the Jesus the Christ, you have been granted entrance into eternity with the Father forever, because by His grace, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.