

GRATITUDE



PASTORAL LETTER 2011

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CHAPTER ONE

GRATITUDE/GIVING THANKS

1. INTRODUCTION:

“Be joyful always, pray at all times, in everything give thanks, for that is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18). With this admonition from the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians, we introduce the theme of this pastoral letter which is on "giving thanks" or "Gratitude".

It is my desire to single out the virtue of gratitude, the habit of giving thanks, to educate my people on its meaning, purpose and promise, in order that understanding, they will offer thanks with intention and attention, in joy and hope, in responsibility and fulfillment to all and through all to the ultimate object of our gratitude, namely God. Consequently, this virtue will be positively reinforced in the hearts and minds of the people of God which will lead them to a life of appreciation and gratitude as lifestyle or way of living.

The celebrated German Medieval mystic and preacher, Meister Johann Eckhart (c1260 – 1327) once said that “If the only prayer you said in your whole life was 'thank you', that would suffice.” This does not thereby mean that a “thank you” to God or to a fellow human being for a specific favour received is enough prayer for a whole life. No. It rather means that, among other things, real and heartfelt gratitude generates a fundamental attitude towards God and towards other human beings that can in a certain manner be said to be synonymous with prayer, or creates an atmosphere where sincere prayer flourishes. The statement affirms that genuine expression of gratitude is prayerful. It means that the human consciousness of indebtedness makes a world of difference in what we do; in our judgment

of events, of ourselves and others. It makes a remarkable difference in the way we perceive our gifts, our endowments, our powers, our blessings. Gratitude creates an impulse to fall on our knees in submission and in praise of God's goodness.

2. A sense of gratitude thus influences immensely our being as humans and more so as Christians. Without this recognition of our indebtedness to God primarily, and also to other mortals whose being and actions impact positively on us, we can very easily develop the attitude of scornfulness, and a sense that we deserve the good things that have come our way. This can lead to ingratitude that can in turn lead to not valuing or trampling on our opportunities and other good things that God by his providence has made to come our way. Doing so, the human being can then neglect his duty to improve the world, himself and others through his gifts and their employment for good ends. By so doing, he fails in his responsibility to contribute his little quota in making God's Kingdom realized on earth.

3. On the other hand, to be grateful to God is to count one's blessings. According to Robert Quillen, "when you count your assets, you always show a profit." To count one's blessings, even to recognize them would appear easy or facile, but to do so in reality is very difficult. According to Aldous Huxley (1894 - 1963). "Most humans have an infinite capacity to take things for granted." The reason is that there is a tendency to neglect the gifts we have received from God and thus take them for granted. Human needs, desires and aspirations keep on transcending themselves. The conquest of one level leads to its replacement by another one usually bigger and more difficult to obtain which immediately captures the attention. Thus a blessing received quickly turns to the quest and prayer for another. For this reason among others, faithful humans are not inclined to spend much time in feeling, expressing and living gratitude.

4. When however we spare some efforts to reflect on all we have received and keep on receiving from God's immeasurable goodness, no matter in what circumstances we may be, the result will be an overwhelming feeling of thankfulness. It is when we do so that we can realize that life, health, food, drink, talents, jobs, country, family, siblings, colleagues, progress, and most other innumerable things are ultimately not owed to our ingenuity. Indeed, one can say with St. Paul, "*What do you have that you have not received and if you have, why do you behave as though it were not a gift.*" (1 Cor. 4:7). In fact, in man's capacity not to express thankfulness, there is the likelihood to neglect to be grateful for the most fundamental gifts, the things that most deserve our gratitude.

5. CHOICE OF THEME: Gratitude or Giving Thanks

This Pastoral Letter is an attempt to prostrate in gratitude to God for all his marvelous and undeserving blessings. As a nation - Nigeria, as a State - Anambra, as a Family of God - the Great Archdiocese of Onitsha and as individuals, we have uncountable reasons to give thanks. *Thus, having dwelt on life, love, faith, our heritage as Christians, the common good,*

family and human life, youth education and prayer in my former pastoral letters, one ought to opt for gratitude both as a virtue and life.

Throughout my life I have noticed the hand of God, providence, shedding its light. I have always seen God, the God of love and love of God leading the way and enabling me to follow. It has thus resulted in thirty years (30) of ministry as a Priest and nine years (9) of service as a Bishop, and eight years (8) as the Chief Shepherd of this Local Church. In these many years, The Merciful Lord has used many and different vessels to accomplish great things for himself and we tremendously offer our sincere thanks.

6. No one takes the credit to himself. Even when accolades and applauses are given; even when praises are lavishly offered; even when it evokes emotions of joy, sense of accomplishments and fulfillment, one should be true enough to feel humbled knowing that they are all effects of the power of grace. Therefore, we should attribute the worth of those successes to God who inspires the ideas, and gives the direction, energies, and resources to accomplish them. Hence, they will inspire us to give thanks to God for his greater glory.

7. Still, I do not lose sight of your contributions, your role in the work of God, your acceptance to be used by the Holy Spirit. I thank you, the Priests, the Religious Men and Women, members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Christ's Lay Faithful. Your co-operation to grace is a cause of gratitude, though ultimately it goes back to God. Therefore, I give thanks so that you too can give thanks.

8. The many blessings on us as we celebrate 125years of our existence as a Local Church (1885 – 2010), as we recall God's favours on us as a nation - 50ycars of Independence, as a State and above all as individuals, I invite all of you to reflect with me on our indebtedness towards our Maker. The need to express our thankfulness is to put our sometimes natural human tendencies under guard, thus precluding the possibility of serious oversight in our daily life. It is intended to inspire us to become ever more conscious of the immense debts we owe the Almighty. These are debts all of which we cannot recount since the majority of them are not even known. But in general, the ancient writer Ovid is correct in his statement that “Thanks are justly due for boons unbought.” In the same vein, a Chinese proverb enjoins that “when eating bamboo sprouts, remember the man who planted them.” Each human person has the capacity to recognize that many of the boons that have come his way have not really been bought, and that the bamboo sprouts he is eating have been planted by God. It is a pious act to try to awaken this knowledge and remembrance.

9. Again, the difficult situation in which we are compelled to live in our country can build a habitual negative perception in many of us. Our dysfunctional institutions; our collective failures; personal disappointments and our inability to see the light at the end of our numerous dark tunnels can incline many of us only to sing our woes. The thankful attitude towards God sees through all the dismal realities of our life for what they are, but has strong

confidence in God to emphasize and trust in the positive. That is why for Kak Siri, “gratitude is an art of painting even an adversity into a lovely picture.” It is a way of praising God and looking for his positive hands even in the most difficult circumstances of our daily life.

10. This reflection is therefore an invitation to a positive change; to move on more positively within our God given ambience; to improve our dismal situation; to be positive in our perception and to seek for the positive, for God our Maker cannot be associated with anything negative. Seeking for the positive and returning thanks is necessary for it revamps our possibilities for what is good. For Gerald Good, it is like turning one's life around. Hence he says, “If you want to turn your life around, try thankfulness. It will change your life mightily.” This project can only be achieved with God's help, but we must first recognize his works in us; his mercy, his solicitude for our well-being in all its dimensions.

It is this excellence of gratitude to God that we are expressing here. Our reflection entails that it needs to be expressed, since gratitude felt and not expressed is not very useful. According to William Arthur Ward, “Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.” Expressing thankfulness is in praise of God the ultimate author of all we have and are. He is the author of all we can be and should be grateful for. The excellence of gratitude compels us to say with the Psalmist, “It is good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises unto thy name, O most high” (Ps. 92:1).

CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURE OF GRATITUDE

11. Gratitude has many nuances. The *New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary* defines gratitude as “a feeling of appreciation for a kindness or favour received.” This definition has a good measure of truth, but it hides much that is involved in the nature of gratitude. Gratitude involves a feeling, no doubt, but this feeling is in turn, founded on knowledge and awareness. One who has no knowledge of an act of kindness, or one who does not judge a known act to be that of kindness cannot understand its value, and most likely not have any deep feeling of gratitude for it. Again, the mere feeling of gratitude does not replace nor stand for its expression. In a way, it is that expression that makes it real. The expression can be merely verbal, but real gratitude implies a change towards the object; a certain measure of indebtedness, a certain prohibition of bad will; a certain obligation to do good towards the object of thanks. That is why a concept like gratitude is best explained or described by stipulative definition which enumerates the major features of a term and enables us to have a more comprehensive grasp of its meaning. Accordingly, gratitude, in addition to all other characteristics, involves the following:

11.1. It is Expressive but not Exhaustive:

Gratitude is a feeling that must be expressed for it to be real. The means of its expression may be varied but the necessity of its expression can hardly be disputed. One who receives a gift and does not express thanks verbally, and also does not do anything to show that he appreciates what he has received and the fact of receiving it cannot be said to be grateful for that gift. That is why Robert Brault opined that *“there is no such thing as gratitude unexpressed. If it is unexpressed, it is plain, old-fashioned ingratitude.”* This means that expression is part of the nature of gratitude. The American novelist and Nobel Prize Winner, William Faulkner, explains it this way: “gratitude is a quality similar to electricity: it must be produced and discharged and used up in order to exist at all.” It means that like electricity which cannot really be stored; which is put into active use once it is produced, gratitude is a pro-active quality. It swings into expression in words and action once it exists. Of course, this expression, taking account of the internal and spiritual dimensions of man, can be visible and invisible, but it must somehow be expressed in order to be. For William Arthur Ward, as already cited, *“Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.”* In this case, what is wrapped ceases to be really a gift. So is gratitude.

Still in a way, gratitude cannot really be fully expressed, in any case, not to the fullest. For instance, our expressions of our debt of gratitude are finite compared with our indebtedness, which is so to say infinite, especially with regard to the Almighty. In this regard Felix Frankfurter's word is very expressive: "gratitude is one of the least articulate of emotions especially when it is deep." Thus one can rightly observe that while gratitude must be expressed to exist, its expression cannot erase its debt. It is only a feeble sign of that which lies within. When this is understood in reference to God to whom we owe all that we have and are, it becomes clear how what is expressed in gratitude runs short of our real indebtedness.

11.2. It is Commemorative:

Gratitude is founded on remembrance. It is because we keep in mind, and bring to constant awareness the hand of God in our lives that we can be grateful to him. Basic gratitude is the refusal to forget the gift of one's origin, of one's creation. The gratuitous gift of today is based on that of yesterday. That one is alive is because one is able to enjoy the blessings of his coming into life. For Jean Baptiste Massieu, “gratitude is the memory of the heart.” Affirming the necessity of this memory, William Shakespeare enjoins his readers as follows: “Let never day nor night unhallowed pass, but still remember what the Lord hath done” (*King Henry the Sixth*).

11.3. It is Obligatory:

In the common run of things, there is an unwritten conventional law imposing an obligation of thankfulness for favours received in all human societies. One is not bound to receive a

gift at Christmas, but one is bound to express appreciation to the person who takes it upon himself to give one a Christmas gift. G.K. Chesterton, the philosopher of the common man, makes an analogy that expresses this obligation. He writes: “when we were children, we were grateful to those who filled our stockings at Christmas times with gifts. Why are we not grateful to God for filling our stockings with legs?” The little gifts used to fill the stockings of children at Christmas are in comparison to the gift of legs which fill our stockings, so small that if we were grateful to humans for children's Christmas gifts, our gratitude to God should be infinite. In the common run of things, the little thank you we express to fellow human beings is such that if omitted, creates a certain distaste and awkwardness. Compared to the immense gratitude of all to God, gratitude can best be described and seen as a religious obligation. Hence, we sing in the *Preface* to the Second Eucharistic Prayer, that it is our duty and our salvation always and everywhere to give thanks to God.

The book of Psalms repeatedly calls on us to give thanks and praise to God as a duty (cf. Ps. 50:14; Ps. 95:2; Ps. 100:4; Ps. 140:13; Ps. 107:8; Ps. 18:3; Ps. 66:8). The same instruction is found in many places in the Sacred Scriptures. The First Letter of St. Peter articulates this obligation to all Christians as it says;

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart to be his personal possession, to sing the praises of God who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9).

11.4. Gratitude is Ever Enduring:

There is so much the average human should be grateful for that he will most likely never fulfill his debt of gratitude to completion. This applies first to our obligations to God and equally applies even to the obligations we owe to human beings. In the words of Terri-Guillemets, “As each day comes to us refreshed and anew, so does my gratitude renew itself daily.” The reality for which we are grateful is of some value to us, and each day, as this value unfolds, expands and is harnessed, we remember its source and should renew our gratitude. In this sense an ancient proverb says that “one can pay back the loan of gold, but one dies forever in debt to those who are kind.” God's goodness to us surpasses the debt of gold and mere human kindness. Therefore, we die forever in debt to him.

11.5. Gratitude is a Virtue:

Gratitude is a virtue, a good habit. According to St. Augustine, such a habit can only be used to do good and never to do evil. The Roman writer Cicero idolized this unique virtue by saying that “gratitude is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all others.” An ingrate is not the type of person who is proficient in acquiring other virtues. As a virtue, gratitude is close to magnanimity and is akin to it. The ancient Greek writer, Aesop (c. 620 - 560BC), described gratitude as “the sign of noble souls,” and for the Roman philosopher,

Seneca, it expresses greatness of mind (magnanimity), so much so that there is as much greatness of mind in acknowledging a good turn, as in doing it.”

11.6. Gratitude Expresses Beauty and Excellence:

The connection between the virtue of gratitude and magnanimity points to its beauty and excellence. Magnanimity or greatness of soul is one of the attractive moral virtues. For Henry Ward Beecher, thankfulness is the “fairest blossom which springs from the soul.” In praise of the virtue, G.K. Chesterton says, “I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.” Gratitude like other virtues perfects the entire being of a human person making him simply good. It is this wholistic goodness that radiates beauty and excellence.

11.7. It is Pleasant and Rewarding:

In many ways, gratitude contains its own reward. In the measure in which we are able to acknowledge a good turn, we even increase the psychological and spiritual effect of the turn we have received. There is a feeling of nobility, nay humanity that accompanies thankfulness which raises one's positive self-perception. The pleasant reward is why Joseph Addison says that “there is no more pleasing exercise of the mind than gratitude. It is accompanied with such an inward satisfaction that the duty is sufficiently rewarded by the performance.” It is even more so when God is the recipient of our sentiment of gratitude. For the American preacher and emancipationist, Henry Ward Beecher, “let the thankful heart sweep through the day and, as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings.” Thus, ironically while gratitude is an obligation and a duty, it is one that attracts for us more blessings and more rewards; as we render in the Preface:

You have no need of our praise... Our prayer of thanksgiving adds nothing to your greatness, o your greatness, but makes us grow in your grace... (Weekday Preface IV).

11.8. Gratitude is Difficult but Simple:

The human tendency to forget is the root of our ingratitude. In the Old Testament, the Israelites all too often forgot their covenant with the Lord, and the deliverance wrought by him on their behalf. It is this characteristic to forget that makes gratitude to be a difficult task in practice. In his book, *Reflections on the Human Condition*, Eric Hoffer asserts that, “the hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our blessings.” Since we do not know how to so, we very often find it difficult to be grateful. Thus the practice of gratitude requires a certain degree of discipline. But if the arithmetic of gratitude is mastered, one realizes that it becomes much easier practice. In essence it benefits us so much a practically no real cost. An ancient proverb says: “Thanks cost nothing.”

11.9. Gratitude Defines our Being as Good:

To be fully human is more than possessing vegetative life. The human being is a transcendent being, surpassing the materiality of his existence. One avenue of doing this is to be aware of one's natural endowments which are what we owe to our Creator. For the American Novelist, Thornton Wilder (1897 – 1975), "we can only be said to be alive in those moments when our hearts are conscious of our treasures." This consciousness must accompany our expression of gratitude, for our awareness extends to profound understanding of our unworthiness before our treasures, and urges us to appreciate their source. Hence, ingratitude shows the opposite pole of humanity, it marks the stark divergence between the good and the bad. For R.H. Blyth, "there is no greater difference between men than between grateful and ungrateful people." The possibility of ingratitude can also present the human person in a bad light even in comparison with lower creatures. Many domestic animals have the ability of expressing unflinching joy and gladness before their masters or benefactors. Those with whom they live and who are vital for their comfort and continued existence are constant objects of their affection. Even if this reaction can be taken to be instinctual, it brings gratitude to the natural level of animal existence. In comparing human capacity for ingratitude and its absence in a dog, Mark Twain made the following statement: "if you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a dog and a man." The human being is capable of biting the finger that feeds him. However, that is only for ungrateful human beings. And it goes to show the nobility of the grateful person and the very low level of being of the ungrateful.

11.10. God is the Ultimate Object of our Gratitude:

Our relationship with God should be that of unending gratitude. God is in essence the final object of our gratitude. This is so because whatever favour we are able to receive from any of his creatures has been made possible by his blessings, his gifts. That is in fact the theological foundation of gratitude.

CHAPTER THREE

REASONS FOR GIVING THANKS

12. The nature of gratitude has offered us many reasons for its practice. Besides, St. Paul exhorts the Colossians to give thanks with joy to God our Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light; He has rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the Kingdom of his dear Son our Lord Jesus Christ; And by Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven. (cf. Col. 1: 12-14).

These four-fold blessings are ours today and constitute our reasons for giving thanks to God since we enjoy the same heritage on account of our faith in Christ Jesus. Nevertheless,

these are only part of the reasons for our thankfulness. In addition there are many other reasons which I will summarize as follows:

- a. Gratitude offers worship and honour to God;
- b. It is both Biblically inspired and commanded;
- c. Gratitude accords with our nature and dignity as humans;
- d. Ingratitude has negative consequences;
- e. And gratitude is a virtue.

13. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that God created us to know him, to love him, to worship him and to live with him eternally in heaven. Thanksgiving offers worship to God thus fulfilling the purpose of our being. It recognizes our finitude and our dependence on God's providence. Giving thanks therefore gives worship and honour to God.

14. The Sacred Scripture is replete with many references of instances of thanksgiving in the lives, acts and illustrations of great persons, people and nations. It also becomes very normative from the life and example of Jesus Christ. He started his prayers with thanksgiving in all his recorded prayers (cf. Matt. 11:25; Lk. 10:21; Jn. 11:41; Jn. 17:1; Matt. 6:9); (cf. also, V. Okeke, *The Splendour of Prayer* #44). Again, Christ ended his ministry on a note of thanksgiving. He surrendered his life in loving obedience to his Eternal Father for our salvation, making himself bread given for the life of the world, - the Eucharistia. He then commanded us to continue the thanksgiving memorial sacrifice in memory of himself.

There are many other instances of the call and command to give thanks found in the Sacred Scriptures some of which we have mentioned in our exposition of the nature of gratitude as an obligation.

15. Further, it accords with our nature as humans and vocation as Christians to give thanks. This is clear from the nature of gratitude that as creatures and dependent beings we show appreciation, more so for redeemed human being.

It is good to note the negative consequences of the absence of gratitude or clear ingratitude. In the Holy Bible, examples abound where God provided for his people when they gave thanks and expressed gratitude. He fought their wars (cf. Joshua 6:20; 2Chronicles 20:21-24). He rescued them from peril (cf. Acts 16:25); and gave them blessings. On the contrary, when they refused to give thanks, he seemed to leave them on their own to discover their insufficient strength and failures (cf. Deut. 28: 47 - 48; Malachi 2:2). Consequently, ingratitude leads to proud humanism; it is a denial and distortion of the truth of our being and has negative consequences.

16. Finally, one of our major reasons for giving thanks is that it is a virtue. It is our Christian responsibility to grow in virtues. Skills perfect some aspects of the human person making one capable or simply talented in some aspects of life. Virtue, on the other hand, perfects the whole person and makes one a good man. Since gratitude promotes other virtues like humility and magnanimity, "*full of gratitude will reveal the tendency and desire to be "full of grace," and grace has its fragrance.*" In the words of St. Paul, "thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and who makes known through us the fragrance that consists of the knowledge of him in every place." For we are like a sweet-smelling incense offered by Christ to God." (cf. 2Cor. 2:14-15). We can say that God deigns to suffuse the heart of the thankful person with the sweet fragrance of the Spirit which he spreads. As the virtue of gratitude makes one a good man, that goodness radiates the grace of God and the sweet fragrance of the spirit.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF GRATITUDE

17. In our discussion on the nature of gratitude, we have seen that gratitude is among other descriptions, "*the memory of the heart.*" This memory arises from knowledge of our origin. Where do we come from? To whom do we owe our existence? Are we really the product of chance? In other words, who made us? What is our destiny? Why are we, individually and collectively, in existence and not out of it? These are questions with serious theological and also philosophical implications. When they are taken seriously and reflected on, the thinking human being will ultimately zero in on the intelligence and purposefulness of the creator, God. It will further show us that we are the work of God, both primordial and current. Keeping this knowledge in mind will constitute a wellspring of sincere and prayerful gratitude.

18. God created the world from nothing. He did not create it for his own benefit, since it is not possible to add anything to his excellence. God is a perfect being who does not need us to exist or to function. But if, from the human perspective, we must add a motive for God's creation, a reason why he made us, we must say it is because of his love: The magnitude of God's love in creation is seen in conscious consideration of the difference between our existence and non-existence; our being and non-being. All we are, all we experience, all we do are owed to this original immeasurable act of God's love. Without him we are nothing. As Christ reminded his disciples, "without me you can do nothing." (Jn. 15:5).

19. It is thus not mere existence that the human race owes to God. God made man the most excellent product of his creation. This is attested to by the Genesis account of creation, and acknowledged in the song of praise of the Psalm (Ps. 8:4-7).

“When I see the heavens, they work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you arranged, what is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you should care for him? Yet you made him little less than a God; with glory and honour you crowned him, gave him power over the works of your hand, put all things under his feet.”

20. The fact of dominion over God's creatures attests to the immense height to which man was raised from nothing. But the foundation of this is that he is made in God's own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). This has innumerable and far-reaching implications. Man is not just one of the creatures; he is one with a special and specific difference among all other creation, and acknowledged in the song of praise of the Psalm (Ps. 8:4-7).

“When I see the heavens, they work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you arranged, what is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you should care for him? Yet you made him little less than a God; with glory and honour you crowned him, gave him power over the works of your hand, put all things under his feet.”

21. These gratuitous gifts of God; these endowments place man in a very privileged position. He is both spiritual and material; a child of two worlds, the earthly and the heavenly. He belongs at once to the two great categories of God's creative product. In the golden chain of being (*aurea catena*), he is the pivotal link between the spiritual and the material levels of being since he shares eminently the most fundamental features of both. In a sense, God's creation makes man metaphysically indispensable, and this feature applies to each and every individual. It underlies the importance of the simplest of human beings, and as Baruch Spinoza says, “You are an important page in the book of creation, without you the book will be incomplete.”

22. All these show clearly how God has special solicitude for the human being. He is the image of God; the excellence of his productive creation. This solicitude overshoots man's unfortunate disobedience to God's will, so that even after the dispensing of his justice, it continues to take care of human well-being. God offered his only Son to become man in order to save us. It is a show of incomparable love - *Greater love than this no one has, to lay down his life for his friends* (cf. In. 15:13). By the sacrifice of Jesus for us we are fully brought back into God's household. We are the adoptive sons and daughters of the Almighty. Jesus is now our adoptive brother. With him we are siblings and heir to the glory of God. That is why the human being has dual citizenship. He is at once a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem and the earthly one. We can now become sharers in Christ destiny, his death, his resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:4), and eventually be like him since we will see him as he really is, (cf. I John 3:2). This is like the final closing of the circle since God created us in his own image and likeness.

23. The human being cannot therefore be tired of proclaiming the wonderful work of God. As it is said in the First Letter of John, "Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children. " (1Jn. 3:1). We cannot thank God enough for his love; for the height in which he placed us in his creation; for his continuous and daily sustenance, and for the glory which will eventually be ours. The human being should in response be eternally grateful to God. This gratitude is unbounded and requires very deep and special deference and special consideration. It should set off in the human being a disquieting quest for ways to express it and stimulate him to fashion his life in such a way that it becomes a repayment, even though a feeble one, for God's immense love.

CHAPTER FIVE

GRATITUDE: SOME BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

24. The wonderful works of God in creation which is the root of our gratitude is continually kept alive in our memory. We are daily reminded of this wonder by what we experience of God's creation. It is also kept alive in our awareness by the unending and sustaining solicitude of the Almighty for mere mortals. God is not only our creator but also our sustainer in continued existence. The Psalmist gives thanks to God for this care of God after experiencing the magnitude of his creation. How is it that the one who created the heaven and the firmament, the universe as a whole is so concerned about humans? In practical terms, the experience of the continued and ongoing sustenance is what sets off the sentiment of gratitude in human beings.

25. We see this unending care of God for his people in different scenes in the Bible. There are many instances of gratitude addressed directly to God and others mediately to God through showing gratitude to fellow humans.

In the First Book of Samuel, Hannah is very much aggrieved on account of her barrenness. She prayed to God in tears promising that if she should be given the grace of bearing a child, she would give him over completely to the service of the Lord. When Samuel was born, his mother did not forget the promise she made to the Lord. She brought Samuel as promised to God's service. *"This is what I prayed for, and Yahweh granted me what I asked him. Now I make him over to Yahweh for the whole of his life."* (1 Sam. 1:27). Samuel became an instrument in God's hand, a prophet and a leader of the people of God. But God in turn rewarded Hannah's gratitude many folds over. She was granted five other children, three boys and two girls, apart from Samuel. (1Sam. 2:21).

26. The biblical account of the legendary friendship between David and Jonathan is for us another shining example of gratitude and magnanimity directly to a fellow human and indirectly to God. Between the two friends there was no tinge of jealousy, and no envy and no rivalry. The natural heir to the throne, Jonathan, did not cease to protect David against

the wrath of Saul, even when it was becoming obvious that the throne was going to David. With the untimely and unexpected death of Jonathan, and after David had obtained and secured his kingdom, he was not oblivious of the friendship between them. David went out of his way to seek for any survivor in the house of Saul to show kindness in appreciation of the friendship between him and Jonathan. *"Is there anyone still left of Saul's family so that I can show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"* (2Sam. 9:1). Meribah was brought to David, and he became part of the King's household, sitting at table with him. He gave him the status that was given to other sons of the king. He restored all the property of Saul's family to Meribah, and ordered the servants to work for him.

27. King David again showed exemplary gratitude to God himself for all his favours. When the king had settled in his house, he was stricken by regret that though he, a mere mortal was living in a properly built house, the Ark of the Covenant was still residing in a tent. He decided to build a befitting abode for the Lord. He called Nathan the prophet to announce his intention. Nathan did not hesitate to encourage David to do what he planned to do in gratitude for God's favours. But it was not to be as the message of the Lord reversed the plan of David. He was not to build a house for the Lord, but the Lord rewarded him for his good intention and vowed that his dynasty shall last forever. David was overwhelmed by thankfulness and uttered the following in appreciation:

Who am I, Lord Yahweh, and what is my house, that you have led me as far as this? Yet in your sight, Lord Yahweh, this is still not far enough, and you make your promises extend to the House of your servant for a far-distant future... What more can David say to you, when you yourself have singled out your servant, Lord Yahweh? For your servant's sake, this dog of yours, you have done so great a thing by revealing this to your servant. In this is your greatness, Lord Yahweh; there is none like you, no God but you alone, as our own ears have heard (2Sam. 7:18-23).

28. In the same way, the Psalmist at several instances broke into songs of thanksgiving in sublime recognition of the goodness of God. These songs of gratitude sometimes focused on the particular individual in question, sometimes the recipient of favours that elicit thanks are the people of God in general, and sometimes it was a third party. In general, the act of thanksgiving was due to God's love for human beings; a love that endures forever. *"Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love endures forever."* (Ps. 18:1).

29. Both in the Old Testament and the New, examples of gratitude are as many and varied as there were persons and circumstances for which they gave thanks. We recall the joyful praise of God in gratitude for delivering the Israelites from the land of slavery and leading them across the Red Sea (cf. Ex. 15:1-21); the song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, in thanksgiving to God for giving her a son (cf. 1Sam. 2:1-10); the thanksgiving song of Jonah for the Lord's graciousness in unusually transporting him to the place of his assignment (cf.

Jonah 2:1-9). There are words of thanks addressed to individuals like Ruth to Boaz (cf. Ruth 2:8-17); Israelites to Jonathan (cf. 1Sam. 14:45); Abigail to David (cf. 1Sam. 25:40-42); among many others.

In fact, reasons for giving thanks could range from victory, salvation, prayer answered, conversion, to deliverance from enemies and other fortunes granted. (cf. 1 Cor. 15:57; 2Cor. 9:15; Jn. 11:41; Jn. 6:11, 23; 1Thess. 1:2).

30. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus is depicted as breaking into a prayer of thanksgiving on the return of his disciples from successful mission:

I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what is pleased you to do. (Luke 10:21. 22).

31. Again, Jesus presents God as showing regard for everything sacrificed for his sake and for the sake of the Kingdom. Not an iota of what is sacrificed will be lost, rather it will be rewarded a hundredfold on earth, and with eternal life in the hereafter. (Mk. 10:28-30).

32. After the cure of the leprous man (cf. Mk. 1:40-45), Jesus forbade him from talking to anyone about his cure. But overwhelmed with gratitude, the former leper went about talking freely and telling the story everywhere. The renown the Lord gathered about the leper's proclamation ironically became a hindrance to his free movement.

In contrast to the single leper, nine of the ten lepers he cured in a similar fashion, simply disappeared and never did anything to show gratitude for the cure they received (Lk. 17:11-19). This act of ingratitude set off a rare case of complaint in the whole life of Jesus. The single Samaritan who came back to give thanks was praised and received even more blessings, while nine others did not care at all to return thanks to their healer. This example goes to show how necessary it is to continually give thanks to God for his innumerable favours we unceasingly receive from him.

33. In his numerous Epistles, St. Paul gives us shining examples of how we should continually thank God for his favours. Paul sees the fruit of his labour as Apostle of the gentiles in the light of the grace of God: "*I planted, Apollos watered, but it is only God who gave the fruit.*" (1 Cor. 3:6). Accordingly, all his Epistles are introduced with expressions of thanks to God about the positive sides of the community he was writing to. (cf. Rm. 1:1-7; 1Cor.1:1-9; 2Cor. 1:1-11; Phil. 1:3-11; Col. 1:3-14; 1Thess. 1:2-10).

34. Paul also expressed heartfelt thanks to the Philippians for their constancy in providing for his needs. He asserts that he was not in dire need of material help, since he had learnt to manage with what he had. But it was good for the men of Philippi to have thought of him and come to his aid. They were in fact the only community from which he received such sustenance at the beginning of his ministry, and through their help he has been able

to have enough for his upkeep. Paul calls their gift “*a sweet fragrance, the sacrifice that God accepts and finds pleasing. In return my God will fulfill all your needs, in Christ Jesus, as lavishly as only God can.*” (Phil. 4:18-19).

35. Thus from his personal life and example, Paul was able to advise the Colossians that they should “always be thankful.” (Col. 3:15). This means that our acts of thanks should not be zeroed only on specific and particular experiences of favours received from God. Our life as a whole, our thoughts and actions should be done in such a way as to acknowledge our indebtedness to God. This should be so in all conceivable circumstances. “*In everything give thanks for that is what God expects of you in Christ Jesus.*” (1 Thess. 5:18). Such an attitude to life and towards God and fellow human beings eschews all shades of anxiety, rancor, and sadness. Still it takes account of the world of needs. “*There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving.*” (Phil. 4:7).

36. Remarkable Examples of gratitude in the New Testament would include:

- Simeon's song and prayer of thanksgiving which we today refer to as NUNC DIMITTIS (Lk. 2:29-32);
- Zechariah's prayer of thanksgiving at the birth of his son, John the Baptist, FREE which we have come to know as the BENEDICTUS (Lk. 1: 68-79);
- Virgin Mary's prayer, song of praise and gratitude, now known as the MAGNIFICAT (Lk. 1:46-55); and
- Our Lord Jesus Christ's thanksgiving sacrifice (Lk. 22:14-20). This we know as the Holy Eucharist or the EUCHARISTIA.

Simeon's prayer was in thanksgiving to God who kept his promise, that he would not see death until he had seen the Messiah; while Zechariah's song and prophecy was in appreciation to God who gave him a son. He did not want to presume that the good or blessings which come his way are his entitlements.

We would have more time to revisit the attitude of Mary and Jesus to giving thanks. These examples and numerous others point us to the attitude that is at once Christian, intelligent and salvific. Anyone who really stops to think of what he owes to his maker and sustainer, as well as to his fellow human being, cannot but live the rest of his life in gratitude, irrespective of how difficult it may be. Doing so raises the awareness of the blessings we have received from God and human being. This awareness leads to appreciation of the value of what we have received and serves as an effective antidote against sadness as well as promotes the cause of Christian joy.

CHAPTER SIX

MARY: THE WOMAN OF GRATITUDE

37. Our Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary has left us an example to follow. She displayed her deep faith and humility in her song and prayer of thanksgiving - the Magnificat. In that song, we are able to glimpse her inner disposition towards God and also her self-perception. She had a healthy esteem of self and attributed so much honour to God. *Magnificat is not her prayer; it is her life.*

Magnificat, which is a hymn of gratitude and humility to God who has done great favours for Mary, was Mary's response in gratitude to grace received. In Mary we observe the closeness and unity between grace and gratitude. Being full of grace as the Angel saluted her (cf. Lk. 1:28), she was also full of gratitude and of the Holy Spirit which is the uncreated grace. And being inspired by the Spirit of God she responded in gratitude which is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Sacred Scripture speaks of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the salvation history. Jesus was conceived (in the womb] of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 1:18; Lk. 1:35), and according to the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, we are speaking of an unprecedented and humanly inconceivable novelty: “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” (In. 1:14a). (cf. Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, nos. 11 and 15).

38. Mary's response to grace which expresses itself in a life of gratitude is also the effect of the power of the Holy Spirit working in her. With reference to the Magnificat, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI writes, that in this marvelous canticle of faith, the Virgin sings the praise of the Lord in his own words. “The Magnificat – a portrait, so to speak, of her soul – is entirely woven from the threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the Word of God. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God, the Word of God becomes her word and her word issues from the Word of God...” (cf. Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 28). The Pope would want us to see that Mary is completely at home with the Word of God. She identifies with the word, enters into it, with ease she moves in and out of it and she is completely imbued with the word. No wonder Mary lived her life based on the word of God; she lived the word of God, a life of gratitude, a life of thanksgiving, the Eucharistic life of the Incarnate Word.

39. We are called to imitate Mary and be open to the word of God, be open to the Spirit of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. The word of God which has its alluring and inspiring potency to incarnate us can transform us and drive us into actions that will daily be a song of gratitude lived every moment to the glory of God.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE EUCHARIST: THE SUPREME ACT OF GRATITUDE

40. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all that he has accomplished through creation, redemption, and sanctification. Eucharist means first of all “thanksgiving” (cf. CCC no. 1360).

41. The love of God for us which is attested to through all his dealings with human beings was brought to its highest level in the story of our salvation in Christ. Christ became a man like us in all things but sin in order to save humanity. In doing so, he became Emmanuel, God with us. The high point of his extraordinary mission of salvation is that he accepted to suffer, to die, in order to liberate us from the shackles of sin. Greater love has no man than this! (Jn. 15:13). It is through his suffering, his death and his resurrection that we are able again to reconcile with the Father and that we become again heirs to his promises. His sacrifice is indeed the highest point of love.

42. This sacrifice is daily commemorated in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The magnitude of his sacrificial love is such that he desired it to be forever. He instituted the priesthood that would make this possible. The “*do this in memorial of me*” ensures that Christ's wondrous sacrifice is daily replicated among his people. Thus, “memorial” here does not mean mere remembrance. It is a reenactment, an *anamnesis* in Greek. It is a memorial which so to say transposes the primordial act into the here and now. It makes an act which was posed *in illo tempore*, to defy the chasm of time and to become present once again. Through the celebration of the sacrament therefore, there is a continuation; a making present of Christ's sacrificial love for man.

43. This sacrificial love, continually reenacted in the Eucharist is the centre of the life of the Christian community. All other acts which that community can perform, arises from and is given meaning by the Eucharist. The sacraments which mediate Christ's sanctification of his people find their origin and their end in this central sacrament: the Eucharist.

44. But the Eucharist is in itself a sacrament of thanksgiving. It is a sacrament which through the history of God's people, and especially in the Scriptures, has been designated by several names. It has been designated as Memorial (1Cor. 11:25); Supreme act of love (John 13: 1-20); Unity (1 Cor. 10: 17); the Lord's Supper while awaiting his return (1Cor. 11:26; Matt. 26:29); Bread of Life and Body of Christ (John 6:51-59); Breaking of Bread (Acts 2:42). One of the most appropriate designations of the sacrament of Christ is nevertheless, EUCHARISTIA, which is Greek word for thanksgiving. In the Eucharist, the Church continually thanks God for his wonderful work in Christ. It is most fitting that this thanksgiving is expressed by offering to God the same sacrifice that Christ offered to save us from the stranglehold of sin and death. In fact, there is nothing greater that the Church can do in appreciation. No prayer, no praise can measure to the sublimity of this sacrament. The Eucharist is therefore the supreme act of thanksgiving where the Church joins her

offering to that of Christ, and thereby making Christ's sacrifice her own. For the individual Christians and for the community of Christians, no act of thanksgiving can supersede participation in the Eucharistic celebration of the Christian community.

45. The continuation of this act of thanksgiving among earthly Christians is made possible by the gift of the ministerial priesthood to the community. The priest acts in persona Christi (in the person of Christ), as Leader of the Eucharistic assembly. He thus exercises that same priesthood of Christ which is the fulcrum of our salvation, in the name of the Church. The priesthood of the faithful is hinged on the effort of Christ's followers and the beneficiaries of his complete self-giving to replicate the generosity which they have experienced in the Lord. At the Eucharist, there is a recounting of the works of the Lord, followed by the reenactment of his primordial act of self-sacrifice. The people, having experienced this stupendous generosity, go into the world, eager to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of their brothers and sisters. It is in making this spiritual sacrifice for their brothers, in imitation of Christ and in gratitude to God, through abnegation and active charity, that they in turn actualize their priesthood - the priesthood of the faithful.

46. In this way all the members of the Church are challenged to make functional their gratitude to God in Christ, to transform the world by making it a world of brotherly love and service: in a word, to make it a Eucharistic world. They are enjoined to make the most of the gift of the Eucharist, by increasing their participation in it, and in gratitude to make special effort to realize the effects of our participation in this supreme act of thanksgiving in the world, so that God will continue to be glorified.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GRATITUDE IN OUR DAILY LIFE

47. The attitude of awareness of our indebtedness to God will in a very special way colour our lives. It eschews pride and inculcates humility. It leads to the full realization that none of us lives for himself alone, and none dies for himself alone. This virtue of gratitude enables us to be constantly aware of God's presence in our lives and to acknowledge his mighty hands all around us. It enables us to value the contributions of our fellow human beings; our neighbors, members of our families, our colleagues at work, our communities, our nation. The attitude of gratitude is a very healthy one, both psychologically and spiritually. That is why it is very fitting and beneficial to make special effort to inculcate it in each and every one of us through continuous practice. This is realizable, among other positive means, through the following acts and living in line with the following principles.

47.1. Continually and daily give thanks to God:

William Ward asks the following question which can set many of us to personal reflection. "God gave you a gift of 86,400 seconds today. Have you used one of it to say thank you?"

This question is a lesson to the person who does not set out special times to express thanks to God. It does not mean that one second out of a whole day is enough to thank God. It does not mean also that we should reserve or restrict giving thanks to God to special times. But it does mean that using one second daily will be much better than not doing so at all. The omission to thank God will, with time, make us not to recognize or use his blessings properly.

47.2. Make Thanksgiving a Way of Life:

Thanksgiving should be done all the time until it becomes our life style and life itself. A practice that becomes a way of life becomes an integral part of the life of the individual or groups of individuals concerned. George Herbert prays that thanksgiving becomes the pulse of his heart: "Thou has given so much to me Give one thing more - a grateful heart... Such a heart whose pulse may be thy praise."

Another saying attributed to Jacqueline Winspear has it that "Grace is not a little prayer you chant before receiving a meal. It is a way to live." The philosopher of the common man, G.K. Chesterton, says the same in different words: "You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, fencing boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink."

In other words, we have to move from mere prayer of thanks to a life of thanksgiving. It should be an attitude, a way of life.

47.3. Express Gratitude to all, even to Inanimate Things:

The primary object of our gratitude is God. We offer our thanks to him for who he is, for his sovereignty and control over the universe, for the wonder of our being and beauty of creation, for our plans, hope and accomplishments, above all, for his love and our salvation in Christ.

Other objects of our gratitude include: our parents, family, Church, the human society and those who have played important roles in our lives. Again, it is very easy to forget that the lower beings, the animals and birds, the inanimate things we have around us; those that make our life easier and more interesting, are things for which we ought to give thanks. George Colman advises: "praise the bridge that carried you over." Figuratively, praising a bridge is a way of praising the owner and the builder and even the person who conceived the building of a bridge that helped you to cross a river or a valley. Such an attitude will find God himself at the very summit of those who deserve praise for the bridge.

47.4. Show Appreciation in Act:

A very practical and effective way of showing appreciation is to make the most of the gift or the blessing for which we are thankful. One time president of the United States, J.F. Kennedy, put this as follows: "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the

highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.” In this sense, living by the words we express in gratitude is to use that for which we are grateful in such a way that its use is another and higher level of gratitude. It would be unseemly and to pretend that one is grateful for receiving a particular thing and then go on to treat that gift as if it were valueless. So, W.T. Purkiser says, “not what we say about our blessings, but how we use them, is the true measure of our thankfulness.” If this thought is extended to the whole of our being, our living in the world; a handling of all the best of endowments, positions, privileges, power and opportunities that God has put in our way, what a different world would we live in! In this respect and in many others, true gratitude has far reaching positive consequences.

47.5. Be Thankful for Little Things:

The habit of gratitude is best cultivated when we make spirited attempt to be thankful to God and fellow humans in the most ordinary things of life. There are so many little circumstances in which we usually forget or presume not to give thanks. There are many acts of kindness which we do not even think deserve our thanks. The waiter in a restaurant who serves you; the police constable standing in the sun who extends a greeting to you at a road block; the pump girl in a filling station who fills the tank of your car with fuel; the seller – petty trader beside the road who sells some oranges or bananas to you; the little boy on the road side who sells a sachet of pure water to you to assuage your thirst; the conductor in a public bus who keeps order so that you make your journey in peace; the driver who drives carefully enough to enable you to arrive at your destination.

Within the family, the young maid who does certainly more than her normal share of chores, and who takes care of your children in your absence, how often do you and your children express thanks to her, and how often does she express thanks to you? Your husband who is perhaps the major breadwinner of the family, does he receive commensurate thanks for fending for all of you? And your wife who keeps the house after her tedious day's work, how often does she receive thanks and praise from the rest of the members of the family? We have innumerable instances for expressing thanks, the more we neglect such occasions, the more we show that we have not learnt the attitude of gratitude. In the opinion of Frank Clark, “If a fellow isn't thankful for what he's got, he is not likely to be thankful for what he is going to get.” The Gospel says that he who is not faithful in little things will not be faithful in bigger things. The habit of being thankful in small things, even when thanks are unexpected, encourages us to God and to humans.

47.6. Count your Blessings:

“In the world of sin and sorrow, there is always something to be thankful for,” so says H.L. Mencken. Our blessings from God are so innumerable that no matter how difficult and hard we think a particular situation is, little reflection will lead us to realize that God is good to

us all the time. The problem we have in doing this is in setting our minds too intently on something with regard to which we do not want to know the will of God. An old proverb has it that a man was crying that he had no shoes until he saw somebody who had no foot. It does not thereby mean that it is only in comparison with our fellow human beings who are less comfortable than we are that we should count our blessings from God. What is significant is that in every conceivable situation there are always numerous reasons to thank God. No matter how hard our present may seem to be, with a little memory we cannot fail to count our blessings and remain grateful to the Almighty. That breeds contentment, joy and even more confidence.

47.7. Begin Every Prayer with Thanksgiving:

Thanksgiving is a very effective type of prayer and an essential form of prayer. The experience of Christ with the ten lepers shows clearly that God appreciates a thankful heart. Because of the situation of human need, our prayers tend to be more of petition or supplication. Such prayers have their value since they underline the knowledge of our dependence on God. But when it is overdone, if our prayers of petition become the central prayer in our spiritual life, it seems to smack of excessive concentration on the self. A thankful heart puts his petitions last. He first praises God for his goodness, and then thanks him for the effects or experience of his goodness. Hence praise and thanksgiving are very intimately bound together. One who begins his prayer with praise and thanksgiving reduces his needs before God. Such an attitude opens us for more of God's favours and blessings. When God asked Solomon to make his supplication, the wise Solomon did not ask for anything personal to him. His attention was rather focused on the affairs of the Lord. The Lord in response blessed him much more than he could ever imagine. The same experience could be ours if we learn to praise and thank God first, before any other type of prayer.

47.8. Express Thanks by Varied Means:

All our thanksgiving must not be in the verbalized form either as testimony or as prayer. There are several ways one can mark his gratitude to God for a favour received from him. One can perform acts of charity, by helping the poor. He can also do so by helping the weak in the society: the children, widows, orphans, those in prison and others disadvantaged. He can sponsor a project that will be beneficial to God's people, all he can do in thanksgiving. Some have built churches, presbyteries, convents, schools and many more as a form of giving thanks to God. Also one can decide to increase in virtue and work against his vices, or to work and be more productive wherever God has placed him to serve his people. We can imagine many other avenues through which we can continually express our thanks to God for his goodness and his love.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

48. "ENTER A NEW LEVEL OF EXISTENCE"

When you learn to give thanks you celebrate God's grace. This will open your eyes to recognize more and more the gifts of God and the good in others. You will now start a new life completely dependent on faith and appreciation of God's goodness.

49. Think of Naaman, the Syrian Army General, who was miraculously cured of his leprosy through the pastoral ministry of Elisha, an Israelite prophet (cf. 2Kings 5:14-17). After his cure, he gratefully responded by vowing to start a new life. "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel...I will no longer offer holocaust or sacrifice to any other God except to the Lord." (cf. 2Kings 5:15-17). Hence, in gratitude Naaman resolved to enter a new level of existence by worshipping the Lord even in his native land. Even in his native land he was not prepared to go back to his former gods or to paganism.

49.1. Also, in the Gospel of Luke 17:11-19, after Jesus had healed the ten lepers, one of them a Samaritan realizing that he had been healed, returned glorifying God in a loud voice; and he prostrated himself at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.

The Samaritan here in gratitude now started to glorify and worship the God of Jesus. Hence gratitude can lead us to a new life if only we can discover it. If we are grateful to God we savour the joy of finding him in his creation. When we truly live a life of gratitude, we are transformed. We enter a new level of existence often marked by praise of God, grace and glory.

50. This pastoral letter has been inspired by the feeling of our indebtedness and the knowledge of what God has done in our personal life all these years. It has been written with the aim of inviting all of you my brothers and sisters to join in a spiritual journey of looking inward so that we remember and count our blessings and express unalloyed gratitude to God in word and in act for his love for all of us. In it we have tried to explain briefly the meaning, the theological and biblical foundations of gratitude, the place of gratitude in our Eucharistic celebration, and to advise on how to make or deepen the habit of gratitude in our daily life. We have pointed out that our gratitude to God is the ultimate, but we must not forget other beings, both human and inanimate, that are like instruments in the hands of the Lord. The thanks we offer to them is in the final analysis the same as the thanks we offer to God, since he is the final clearing house of all our capacities and good qualities.

51. As human beings and creatures of God, the teaching on the importance of gratitude does not thereby permit us to insist on it from our brothers and sisters to whom we have done any good turn. Sure enough, their expression of gratitude to us is very much welcome, but it is not our lot to become crossed if it does not come. The real gratitude is the one

expressed to God. The Christian attitude ever remains that of being unworthy servants who can do no more than their duty demands. (cf. Lk. 17:10). If we are truly so, we can only give glory to God for the good things we are able to do to the Children of God, especially since we owe so much to God their Father.

52. Still a spirit of gratitude enables us to realize the work of God among us, both as individuals and as communities of individuals, and to understand that we are duty bound to be thankful for what we have received, and being thankful to put these gifts into maximum benefit. As a community and as a country, we should therefore not be prodigal with the wealth of God who has endowed us with so much. It is a high degree of ingratitude to God's love that after blessing us with so much human and natural resources, we are comfortable as a country to play in the league of failures. It does not show that we have used our gifts optimally, and the attitude of thankfulness enjoins that we harness what we recognize as gratuitous blessings for the maximum benefit to all the children of God.

53. The right spirit of gratitude is well cultivated will therefore include serious regret and remorse for the failure to count our blessings. Doing so purveys God's forgiveness to us while preparing us to do better in the future. As Christians, life is gratitude lived and without gratitude we are ungodly

54. Let me observe that many of our Christians have shown significant growth in the virtue of gratitude. One notices with satisfaction how many Masses of thanksgiving are booked and celebrated in many of our parishes. There are very many reasons why they come to thank God, and to do so in the celebration of the community Mass. They invite their fellow Christians, friends and well-wishers to join them in presenting gifts to the Lord within the celebration. Such acts are commendable and indicate increasing awareness that it is in God we live and move and have our being. Our prayer is that as this awareness increases, its daily effect will be seen and also experienced well beyond the bounds of our churches into our society, to continually edify it to the greater glory of God.

CHAPTER TEN

55. PRAYER:

God and Father of all gifts, we praise you the source of all we have and are. Teach us to acknowledge always the many good things your infinite love has given us. Help us to love you with all our heart and all our strength. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(From Alternative Collect of the Mass of Thanksgiving)

**Given in Onitsha, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, on 9th March, Ash
Wednesday, in the Year of Our Lord 2011.**

MOST REV. VALERIAN M. OKEKE
Archbishop of Onitsha.