

Thanksgiving

St. Mark 4:26-29: "Thankful for the Every Moment Miracles"

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In Nomine Iesu

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Almighty God, most merciful Father, You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing: We give You most humble and hearty thanks that You have crowned the fields with Your blessing, and have permitted us once more to gather in the fruits of the earth; and we beseech You to bless and protect the living seed of Your Word sown in our hearts, that in the abundant fruits of righteousness we may always present to You an acceptable thank-offering; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (ELH p. 166)

In Christ Jesus, who is both the reason for and the focus of our thanksgiving, dear fellow redeemed:

Only a farmer knows how much work goes into planting and harvesting a crop. In the winter and spring, he prepares his equipment, so that it is ready to go when the weather changes. He purchases seed, watches the forecast, and checks the ground, so planting can begin whenever that window of opportunity opens. Then he watches the growth of the crop and applies time and products as needed to ensure healthy growth. As fall approaches, there is more work to do on equipment. And then the harvest begins, bringing long hours and hopefully a good yield.

But for all the time the farmer puts in, he has no control over the actual growth of the plant. He cannot make a plant do what it naturally does through the right amount of rain and sunshine. This is what Jesus points out in today's text. He says in St. Mark 4:26-29: *"The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."*

Imagine if every plant had to be tended twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, in order for it to grow the fruit or grain that we needed. We would look at produce much differently than we do now. Tremendous resources would be required simply for our survival. But our Lord is happy to do that diligent work for us. He is pleased to provide us our daily bread. The psalmist says, *"The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing"* (145:15-16). If God did not apply His blessed work on a growing plant every moment of every day, no plant would survive and come to maturity.

This is not just the case with plants. This is how it was in our formation as well. Even more miraculous than the growth of a plant from a seed, is the growth of a human being from a fertilized egg. How that tiny egg could produce such a complex being is beyond our comprehension. It is a work that only God can do. The growing child is nourished by its mother, but she does not cause the child's organs to form, its heart to start beating, or its arms and legs to take shape.

Psalm 139 tells who is responsible for these things, *"For you [O LORD] formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."*

Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them” (vv. 13-16).

The formation of our physical life is a miracle, and so is the formation of our spiritual life. Our spiritual life began with the sowing of a seed, but a seed without any form or shape. God caused the seed of His Word to be sown in our hearts. The ground of our heart was like soil that is rocky and polluted. Nothing good could grow there. But through His Word, God cleansed the soil and cultivated it, planting faith and life where before there was nothing but death.

This is how the kingdom of heaven grows. God has the seed of His Word sown, even in places where we would least expect it to do anything, and the seed sprouts and grows – we know not how. We only know that God’s Word does not return to Him empty, and that it accomplishes the purpose that He intends (Is. 55:11). The person who sows the Word is not important. What is important is that the Word is proclaimed, through which the Holy Spirit does the work. The Apostle Paul wrote, “*So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1Cor. 3:7).*

That spiritual growth happens throughout a Christian’s life. The Holy Spirit not only plants the seed of faith in the heart through the Word, but He also nurtures that faith. He brings Jesus to the penitent sinner, who gives Himself as food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, and strength for the weak. Just as surely as He carried the burden of all sin to the cross, so He relieves your burdens of guilt, pain, and sorrow and gives you rest.

Through a lifetime of hardships, setbacks, and struggles, the Lord refines and purifies your faith, so that you grow to maturity and are ready to be harvested for heaven on the Last Day. This is when the angels will gather you to the side of your Savior, along with all those who were grown and preserved by His grace. On that day, you will not think to yourself how your salvation was possible because of all your hard work, or because you were such a skilled Christian. The glory will be and is God’s alone.

This is why, whether we are talking about earthly or eternal blessings, we do not give thanks today in the way that so many do. We do not give thanks that we are such hard workers, or that we have earned wonderful things for ourselves, or that we are so gifted and good, so deserving of the things we call our own. No, we “*give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever” (Ps. 107:1, NKJV). He is the one who has blessed us not just every now and then, not just every day, but every *moment*.*

Our Lord produces miracles for us constantly. It is by His miraculous power alone that we have the food, home, clothing, family, and friends that we enjoy. It is by His miraculous power that we have life at all. It is by His miraculous power that we believe in a Savior who has rescued us from the destruction we deserved. And so we are thankful always, **Thankful for the Every Moment Miracles**, thankful to the God who is good, and whose mercy does endure forever.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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