

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

A very happy Thanksgiving to you. I'm still getting used to saying that, it's only my second ever Thanksgiving. You do know what we call Thanksgiving in England, don't you?

Thursday.

Thursday. However, in recent years - now this is awful - in recent years, we now have Black Friday. Can you imagine that? We have Black Friday, but no Thanksgiving, which is typical of the way that us Brits have a terrible habit of assimilating the worst aspects of American culture, and not the good. Hence, we all listen to soft rock, Kenny G, we've got McDonald's, Bud Light, and very little of the good stuff.

I do realize that today's not a day for moaning, so I'm going to stop there. I'm not going to moan, and neither am I going to speak about the stories which I know are at the root of Thanksgiving, some of which seem a bit dubious to me. I don't want to doubt, that isn't appropriate for me to talk about those. I'm so ignorant, so I'm going to stick to just talking about what our passages set for today say about the theme of Thanksgiving.

I should say in passing that whilst I don't really understand what's going on at Thanksgiving, I do think it's terrific to have a festival just to stop and to be thankful. I think that is a wonderful tradition.

I've got three things that I'd like to say about thanksgiving. The first is that thanksgiving does not come naturally. We see that in our gospel. Jesus heals 10 lepers, but do 10 go back and thank Jesus? No, just the one, and as the text pointedly says, he was a Samaritan, a foreigner. Jesus says, "Where are the others?" They weren't there because they weren't in the habit of giving thanks. It doesn't come naturally.

The recent spat between the president and LaVar Ball reminds me of a man I used to work for called Roger. He was a youth worker at a club that I volunteered in, and there was a time that myself

and the other members of the staff weren't very happy. I was deputed to go and share our concerns with Roger. I said, "Roger, the volunteers aren't terribly happy. They're feeling a bit taken for granted." Let me just translate that into English. In English, that means the volunteers are livid, and are about to all walk out. He would've understood the understatement, but I'm just making that clear for you.

Roger said, "What can I do about it?" I said, "Well, you might start by saying thank you a bit more." I'll never forget his reply. He said, "Thank them? I haven't got time to run around thanking everybody." It was at that moment I realized both how important it is to say thank you, and also that it really doesn't come naturally to people. It is something that all of us have to work on.

Thanksgiving starts with a recognition of all that for which we have to be thankful. Without that starting point, we can't begin to give thanks. Hear this from our Epistle, "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly." Paul assumes that we've been blessed abundantly. It's not easy to catch that vision of abundance. Abundance is not measured by what flows in, abundance is measured by what flows out, what flows over.

The smaller we make the vessel of our needs, the sooner we reach that point of abundance. The smaller the vessel, the easier it is to have an overflow, but too many of us get trapped in a treadmill of consumption, so that when our cup runneth over, what do we do? Do we enjoy the feeling of abundance that comes from that? No. Too often, we just go out and buy a bigger cup. That means we're always living, too often, with an illusion of scarcity, always bemoaning what's in our cup, the gap between what's in there and the rim.

Paul assumes in that reading that we have enough of everything. That's the word he uses, enough. Maybe Thanksgiving is a time to reflect on that, to recognize that we really do have enough. That's not the same as saying we've got everything that we would like, or everything that we need, but we

have enough. Let's not be like the famous American billionaire, who when asked what was enough he said, "\$1 more."

The second thing I'll say about thanksgiving is that thanksgiving requires someone to thank. I know it seems like an obvious point, but it's true that for thanksgiving to happen, there has to be someone to thank. I learnt this simple truth when I was asked to do a funeral once. I was leading the funeral of a woman who, in London, was well known atheist. You might think it was odd that I was asked to do the funeral, it's a long story. Briefly, her sister came to church, and the sister asked me to do the funeral.

I had entered into long negotiations with the rest of the family and all her friends who weren't very happy with me, a Christian priest, leading the funeral. I had to agree what I would wear - not a collar - and I'd cut out all references to God in the service, so that was the deal that we struck.

I'll never forget, I went back to prepare the service, and I had to cut out the committal because there was no one to commit the deceased to; I had to cut out the commendation because there was no one to commend her to. Most striking of all, I had to take out the prayer of thanksgiving because a Christian funeral service begins by thanking God for the life of the deceased. That had to go because in the context of that service, there was no one to thank for the life that we were remembering.

Look again at our Epistle, St. Paul says it is God who provides. He is the source of all life, all love, all goodness, and yet so often in our world, he goes unthanked. We gather in church to give thanks today. We're not only thanking God our provider, we're recognizing, as we do that, that everything we have, even our life itself, comes as a gift from him. It's not that we deserve to be richly blessed, we're not to think of ourselves as better than those who have less material resources.

All that we have, our life, our wealth, everything comes as a gift from God. Recognizing that gift demands a thankful response, and it comes with responsibilities. How are we to use aright the many

gifts and blessings that we have been given? One hears so much these days about rights. We all have rights, and we'll meet so many people who appear to be at ease with the feeling of entitlement to their abundance. We need to be humble, thankful, see everything as a gift.

I was behind a woman in Warwick's last week, and she was complaining to the woman on the till about our homeless population. She said, "We're infested with homeless people." What an awful word, my stomach turned when I heard that. What an awful word to use about our fellow human beings. How are we to think that La Jolla belongs simply to the rich and the privileged? Why should we keep our streets to ourselves? We gather before God mindful that we have been richly blessed. We come to give thanks to God for his many gifts, and to be mindful of our responsibilities to him, and those who have not been blessed so materially.

Finally, thanksgiving can become a habit. John Templeton, a well known English Christian, says that he begins each day by lying quietly on his bed, and thinking of five things to thank God for, a different five every day. That means he starts every day by lifting his heart in thanks and praise to God. He reckons that simple exercise is the reason that he can find such joy and contentment in life, and I'm sure he's right, if you did that every day of your life.

Sir John has cultivated what we might call an attitude of gratitude, an attitude that the ancient thinker, Cicero, would thoroughly approve of. He said, "A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue, but it is the parent of all other virtues," so let's strive to make each day a thanksgiving day. We have reminded ourselves of the need to give thanks that we have a God to whom we can thank for all our blessings. Let's make sure that each day we give thanks to Him for the gift that He has bestowed upon us. Amen.