

ON GIVING THANKS TO GOD

By Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, December 18, 2011

The Lord healed ten lepers, but only one of them, a Samaritan, returned in order to thank our Savior for his healing. The Lord asked, "*Where are the other nine? How is it that they have not returned to give glory to God, except for this stranger?*" (Luke 17:12-19).

This Gospel story reminds us about a feeling which should be inherent in every person and which, unfortunately, not every person has — thankfulness, above all to be thankful to God. The Lord has mercy on everyone and grants His good things to everyone. He heals from various physical and spiritual illnesses, but man often ascribes all that is good in his life either to himself or to chance. It happens that man often does not take notice of these mercies and takes them for granted, not thanking God for them.

The Lord reminds us of the importance of giving thanks, not because He needs our gratitude, but because it is important and necessary for us to feel thankful and to have gratitude. You see, if we don't give thanks to God for the blessings and good things which He sends to us, if we don't feel God's presence in our lives, if we don't perceive that the finger of God is indicating to us the correct path, then sometimes we will make great and tragic mistakes which can affect the entire course of our life. Only that man who, with his entire being and his entire life exhibits thankfulness to God for his blessings, is capable of finding the correct path in this life in the world which will lead him to the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Lord expects us to not only thank Him when something good happens to us, — our entire life should be a thanksgiving for His blessings. During the celebration of the Eucharist, at the very moment before the offering of the Holy Gifts we lift up bread and wine, which are on the diskos and in the chalice, with the words: "Offering unto Thee, Thine own of Thine own, on behalf of all and for all". Bread and wine symbolize the food which we receive from God and everything else which we receive from Him. In the Eucharist we return to God the gift which He has given us. This does not mean that we are rejecting God's gift. On the contrary, it means that in accepting God's gift we rededicate them back again to Him. Namely, these Divine Gifts, which can nourish us physically, are also capable of nourishing us also spiritually, because the Lord changes this bread and this wine into His Body and His Divine Blood. However, we only become worthy participants in these Divine Mysteries when we are capable of offering thanks to God, when our entire life becomes a thanksgiving to God.

Having received the Holy Mysteries of Christ, if we leave the church and go about our ordinary worldly life and forget what has just occurred in church with us, if we forget about the Gift that we just received and live our lives the same as secular people who do not understand that the Lord is present in their lives, then we will receive no benefit from having received Holy Communion. The Eucharist is only beneficial for us when our entire life becomes a eucharist — a thanksgiving to God for His blessings.

This thanksgiving must be expressed not only in words, but above all in deeds. If the Lord has delivered us from poverty and want, He did this in order for us to share our blessings with those who are in need. If the Lord has delivered us from lack of faith and spiritual blindness, He did this also and so that we would be able to reveal the light of the Gospel commandments to those people who dwell in darkness.

Every gift which we receive from God is given to us so that we may also share it with others. If we treat what is happening to us in this way, if we receive the Divine Gifts in this way, then we will not ascribe anything to ourselves, we will not consider anything as our personal property. There is no greater happiness than to consider our life useful for others. There is no greater joy than to share the gifts which we receive from God with our neighbors.

It is recorded in another Gospel story how the Lord took several loaves of bread and two fish, offered them up, and they were miraculously multiplied and thousands of people were able to eat from them, with several basketfuls left over. In the same way the Lord abundantly multiplies His gifts for those people who know how to share them with others.

The Lord calls us so that our entire life would be a thanksgiving to God, so that every day and every hour, having received what the Lord has given us, we would pass it out to others, and then the Divine gift, which we have received, will multiply in a miraculous way.

In this consists the secret of the Christian life: when we give away what we have, when we share with someone, we lose nothing, but, on the contrary, we gain more and more. And the greatest treasure is the Kingdom of God, which awaits us after the threshold of death, but which we already gain here and now in the Divine Eucharist.

Translated by Archbishop Peter Olsen

Translator's note: "Eucharist" comes from the Greek, "ευχαριστία", which means "thanksgiving."