

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Gratitude: Giving Thanks"



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Thanksgiving and gratitude are very important things in the lives of human beings. In fact, authentic human life presumes the ability to be thankful; authentic human life presumes the ability to be grateful.

Gratitude is the state of being grateful. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines gratitude as being “appreciative of benefits received; thankful; affording pleasure or comfort; agreeable.” It comes from the Latin word *gratus*, meaning “pleasing, beloved, agreeable, favorable, thankful.”

To be sure, there are many things (and people) in life for which we need to be thankful, things (and people) that, unfortunately, we all-too-often take for granted. In St. Francis de Sales’ opinion, these things would include: (1) “Consider the nature that God has given to you. It is the highest in this visible world; it is capable of eternal life and of being perfectly united to his Divine Majesty.” (2) “God has placed you in this world...to exercise his goodness in you by giving you his grace and glory. For this purpose God has given you intellect to know him, memory to be mindful of him, will to love him, imagination to picture to yourself his benefits, eyes to see

his wonderful works, a tongue to know him...” just to name a few. (3) “Consider the earthly benefits that God has bestowed on you: the body itself, goods provided for its maintenance, health, comforts, friends, and other sources of strength and encouragement.” (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part I, Chapters 10—12) And the list goes on and on.

Are you thankful yet? Are you grateful yet?

For all that, our giving thanks must go beyond being grateful for who we are and what we have in the eyes of God. Our thanksgiving must go deeper than our appreciation for “benefits received,” for the many goods, blessings and graces that we enjoy.

Gratitude is really an attitude. It’s a way of looking at life. It’s a way of looking at God, ourselves and one another in ways that makes us “pleasing, beloved, agreeable and favorable.”

In the Salesian tradition, gratitude expresses itself in another great virtue close to the heart of St. Francis de Sales.

The practice of generosity.

Our gratitude for all that God gives us should spill over into our relationships with one another. What better way to show our gratitude to God than by being generous to one another? What

better way to show our thanks to God by making people thankful that we are in their lives?

In his Treatise on the Love of God, Francis de Sales echoed the words of St. Paul in describing the impact that giving thanks and being grateful should have upon us. Grateful people are not envious, but generous. Grateful people are not arrogant, but humble. Generous people are not disdainful, but amiable and affable. Grateful people are not easily provoked; they are peaceable. Grateful people do not rejoice over evil, but bask in the light of all that is right and good. Grateful people believe in and work for the good. Grateful people do not complain in the face of difficulty. (Book XI, Chapter 8) Grateful people have a profound sense of trust: trust in God, and trust in others, nourished by the hope to which they are called in the person and promise of Jesus Christ.

Bottom line? Grateful people are positive people. As Francis de Sales told the Sisters of the Visitation nearly 400 years ago, for the humble, grateful, and generous person, all things are possible. (Conference V, pages 74-87) In a word, to be *grateful* is to be *great* in the eyes of God. Now *that’s* something for which to *give thanks!*

