

Gratitude Magnified . . .

One of my favorite spiritual authors tells of leaving a talk which he had given (and had been paid for) when a man came up to him and shoved an envelope into his pocket. "Just a little something extra," the man said. It wasn't until the next day that he looked into his pocket and found an envelope containing \$1000. He sent it to a ministry for people living and scavenging on a garbage dump in Mexico. He thought it might give someone there a chance for a new life. He was totally unprepared for what happened. In a few weeks he was flooded with thank you notes from people there who had benefited from the gift. What he expected to help one person had been shared and many lives were made a little bit better.

What a contrast to the way we usually do things!

Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria in the US and the massive earthquake in Mexico reminded us again of who we can be when we care about each other and work together. What seemed so important before the disaster—the "things" in our lives—paled in comparison to the gift of each other. Despite the loss of material things people were grateful. We've seen many stories about neighbors helping each other clean out water soaked homes and supporting each other through the pain of lost memories and an unknown future. Sadly that's not what usually continues when life "gets back to normal."

Generally it's more like this:

It's November.—Thanksgiving time. We're all supposed to be grateful. Right? We focus on giving thanks one time a year and then it's time to start making Christmas lists and buying the "things" that are supposed to make us and our loved ones happy; but they never quite bring the desired results.

How do we so quickly forget what's truly valuable? Part of it's that we live in a consumer society. The economy improves when people spend more—often on things that they do not need or use. People are often judged more by what they have than by who they are. All of us fall into this trap.

How can we stop clinging to and protecting "my" possessions, "my" ways of doing things, "my" opinions and be open

to the often unnoticed gifts of every-day life that tend to show up in unexpected times and places? When we do become aware we are often overcome with thankfulness.

My grandson Simon is five and a person with autism. Carrying on conversations is difficult for him. Imagine my joy when my son in Baltimore called and Simon wanted to talk to me. "Hi Grandma Angela," he began. "When can I come back to your house? Is the fan in your bedroom running?" he continued/ (He has a fascination with fans) "Grandma, why do you think some kids cry at school?" he asked (We talked about that maybe some were afraid or frustrated) "Maybe they're sad, Grandma," he added. My heart was bursting—Simon and I had had a real conversation! I'm still awash in gratitude for those few moments.

A young man was in church one recent Sunday. He looked thin and worn and hungry. When we talked to him he said he wasn't Catholic but wanted to be in a place where God was. He might not have known it, but to us he was truly an angel sent by God.

Before he died 20 years ago this month my husband and I would embrace each morning and evening and thank God for the gifts of the day. No matter what had happened while we were apart this time together got us back on track. And it allowed

him at the end of his life to give thanks for all that had been, including his struggle with alcoholism, his recovery, and even the cancer that ultimately took his life.

Let's not wait for a disaster or serious illness to remind us to be thankful for what's truly important. This Thanksgiving may our gratitude be like ripples in a stream flowing out and filling every day of the year. How different life would be!



*"If we can realize that everything is God's gift,
how happy will our hearts be!
Everything is his gift.
He is our strength!"*

~ Pope Francis

