

Give Thanks...In All Circumstances?

When things are going well, gratitude is easy, but when life is difficult, when you feel like you're being swallowed up in quicksand and it seems a cloud of gloom is hanging over you, being thankful is probably the last thing on your mind. Yet St. Paul is very clear: "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Are you kidding me? Obviously there must be some glitch in the translation. Paul couldn't have really meant that! How could he? I don't know about you, but there have been some times in my life when there didn't seem much to be grateful for. Sometimes life seemed so dark, messy, and complicated that I felt I'd never get out of the muck. And yet I did get out into the light and I began to recognize these times, painful as they were, as moments of grace when my life took a new direction—often one I never would have asked for, but one I know now that I'd never want to change.

As a young woman, I had very clear plans for my life—I'd pursue my writing career for a while, get married, have a family, and enjoy a long loving relationship with my husband and spend my senior years playing with my grandchildren. Never did I imagine that I'd have many careers—writer, teacher, counselor, pastoral associate—and the most important one of all, being mother to my children. I certainly didn't plan on being widowed, being alone and going through the rest of my life without a partner. We had talked of future plans together. We'd move to a small college town where he'd teach a physics class or two and I'd be moderator of the campus newspaper. It would be an idyllic ivy-covered college life. We also talked about traveling in Europe and checking out our ancestors' homes. I got a passport. Cancer intervened taking those teaching and travel plans with it.

One part of my life plan did materialize, however I have four wonderful grandsons. Though I'm not visiting Austria, I do go

frequently to Baltimore to be with Sam and Simon and I do get to play with my daughter's twin three-year-olds Josh and Zach. These four boys are the joy of my life and I am so thankful for each one of them.

Though the rest of plan that is unfolding is not the one I would have chosen, I know now that it is exactly the right one. Things I could never have imagined now bring me great joy and gratitude and none of these would have been possible if life had turned out according to my plan. For one thing, I probably wouldn't have had the freedom to continue working at St. Leo's—and I smile just thinking of the great privilege of being here. I've never used my passport, but I've travelled to Burundi, Congo, Tanzania, and Guatemala through getting to know, love, pray, and work with our wonderfully diverse parishioners. I always used to try to control things because it felt safer for me to know what's going on. At St. Leo's I've learned to live more in trust (God always gives us everything we need, but it seems it often never comes until the very last second!!) And I'm developing spirit eyesight to recognize and give thanks for God's daily surprises and discovering that God's fingerprints and footprints are everywhere.

There's a story told about two people—one a pessimist; the other, an optimist. The pessimist is given a pony and moans about all the work involved in feeding and caring for the pony that will eventually die—nothing to be happy or grateful for from that point of view. The optimist is given a barn full of manure—and the response? "With all that manure there's got to be a pony around here some place."

Maybe what St. Paul is saying is that God's grace is always with us and that's cause for rejoicing. So when life is hard, look beyond the manure for the pony. Maybe that's what giving thanks in all circumstances is about.

—Angela Anno



St. Leo's Prayer Wall is a place where all, regardless of age, race or creed, are invited to sing God's praises, give Him thanks, and/or call upon His presence for help in times of need. The wall, a place of prayer for all peoples (much like the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem), captures the faces of the community, as well as peacemakers and saints who have inspired us through the ages.



The Wall is a place for our staff and volunteers, youth groups, community meetings, and for individuals who just pass through our parking lot on the way to work, school, etc., to pray, reflect and pause. We hope that you will share in this special way of prayer, joy, and thanksgiving. Praise God!

God cares about every need in your life and knows what you need even before you ask Him for help. Our St. Leo the Great parish community promises to remember you in our private prayer, as well as in our communal prayer, which is to say that we are praying for you all the time.

All prayer requests are held in strictest confidence. **Send your prayer request to:** Saint Leo the Great Church, 2573 Saint Leo Place, Cincinnati, OH 45225