

Sacrifice of Praise

Fourth Sunday of Lent: 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6–7, 10–13a / Ephesians 5:8–14 / John 9:1–41



All images Shutterstock unless marked

The Blessing of a Thankful Heart

In today's Gospel, the disciples questioned Jesus if sin caused the man's blindness. Did he or someone in his family warrant this punishment by their offense to God? The disciples listened and accepted Jesus' explanation that the man's lack of sight was not due to sin but instead was to show the glory of God. Meanwhile, the Pharisees refused to accept Jesus' teaching and in essence became the blind ones. Ironically, their inability to see could be directly attributed to sin — specifically, the sin of pride.

They refused to believe in the miracle which had occurred right before them and would never be able to see the miracles Jesus could perform in their lives. Their metaphorical blindness remained because they were unwilling to believe in any truth other than their own. Jesus has the power and authority to open anyone's eyes, to break through anyone's darkness, but first we have to be willing to see.

Sometimes we face circumstances truly beyond our control, which make

FOR REFLECTION

- Make a list of all the things you are grateful for. Spend time in prayer thanking God for each one.
- In difficult situations, are you able to recognize reasons to be thankful?
- What burdens keep you free from embracing a hope-filled life in Christ?

us wonder what we've done to be abandoned by God or what may have angered him. It is imperative to understand an important truth about God: He does not bring hardships; these exist as a result of the Fall in the Garden of Eden. God has given each of us free will so that we may be able to freely choose to enter into a relationship with him — one based on love, not coercion.

Trusting in God's promises that "all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28), or that "for human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible" (Mt

19:26), can be difficult in the midst of a tragedy, trial, or difficulty. However, one who continues to pray in thanksgiving maintains a grateful heart and remains hopeful, like the man born blind. Although Jesus' method of curing the man's blindness may have seemed strange, the man, thankful for a chance at healing, followed Jesus' instructions.

Lent is the perfect time to rub mud in our eyes, figurately speaking, and allow Jesus to heal our spiritual blindness. Whether currently struggling through a difficult time, or scars from past battles that are hard to forget, prayers of thanksgiving can mold those experiences into blessings. Clarity of vision of the cumulative experiences in our lives belong only with God; apart from him, we will never make sense of them. Remaining close, thankful, and open to seeing his hand in all that happens in the world, keeps our hearts safeguarded from growing hard. Lent is a time to reflect on what blinds us from saying, "Lord, I believe," and a time to refocus on following the Light of the World.

PRAYER TIP

When do you find time for prayer within a typically busy day? Some days do not lend themselves to dedicated or uninterrupted prayer time. Instead of skipping prayer, find ways to build it into the things you are already doing. Here are a few suggestions:

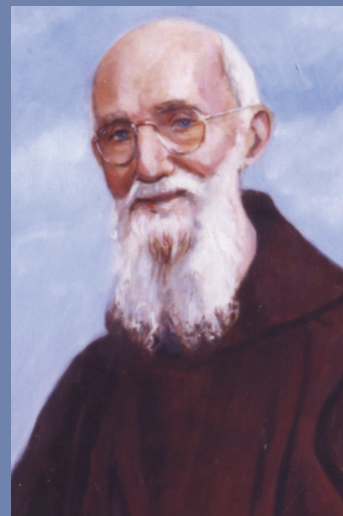
- Use your morning coffee time to read a Scripture verse.
- Recite the Rosary on your drive to work.
- Bring joy to your chores by thanking God for the food that dirtied the dishes, the clothes that now fill the hamper, and a floor that requires vacuuming.
- Offer a Hail Mary while brushing your teeth.
- Pray before (and even after) each meal.

“Give thanks to the Lord ...
whose love endures forever.”

— 1 CHRONICLES 16:34

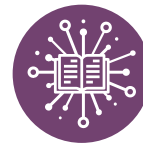
Thank God Ahead

Blessed Solanus Casey was a simple Capuchin friar from Oak Grove, Wisconsin. Blessed Solanus is an extraordinary example of how a person can foster devout faith amid an ordinary life. Through his many hardships, he learned the blessing of maintaining a heart of gratitude, regardless of current circumstances. Solanus often counseled people to consider the good God would do in the future for them, and to “Thank God ahead of time!”



Painting by Nancy Dendy Geerts

CATECHISM CONNECTION



“The inexhaustible richness of [the Eucharist] is expressed in the different names we give it. Each name evokes certain aspects of it. It is called:

“Eucharist, because it is an action of thanksgiving to God. The Greek words *eucharistein* and *eulogein* recall the Jewish blessings that proclaim — especially during a meal — God’s works: creation, redemption, and sanctification.”

— *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1328

“Thanksgiving characterizes the prayer of the Church which, in celebrating the Eucharist, reveals and becomes more fully what she is. Indeed, in the work of salvation, Christ sets creation free from sin and death to consecrate it anew and make it return to the Father, for his glory. The thanksgiving of the members of the Body participates in that of their Head.

— *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2637

Prayer

Lord Jesus, may I remember each day this Lent to thank you for each blessing and each cross. May the devotion I offer you be from a place of great love and not hinge on my happiness, but instead on the blessed hope found in Easter. Our blessings are abundant; so should our thanks to the One who bestows them. Lord, this week, I will pray without ceasing, giving thanks in all circumstances.