

GIVING THANKS

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Lessons: Psalm 104; True Christian Religion 308 (see last page of talk)

Our first reading from the Word is a beautiful psalm of thanksgiving to the Lord. It tells how the Lord created the heavens and the earth, the seas and mountains and the lakes and streams. It tells next how the Lord cares for all the birds and beasts and people He made on earth, giving them food and a place to sleep. In one place it even mentions how the Lord made the world in such a way that people would be able to work in it. Remember those words, for we will be talking about them later: “Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening” (verse 23). Then the Psalm tells of the great glory of the Lord for doing all these things—glory that will last forever. And it ends by promising that people will praise the Lord as long as they live, will think about Him and be glad in Him.

The second lesson, *True Christian Religion* 308, tells how the Lord made the sun to be like a father to all the plants and animals of earth, and the earth itself to be like their mother. It tells how many different kinds of flowers turn their faces constantly toward the sun as it moves across the sky, as if they were honoring their father in this way. And then it tells how the birds sing sweetly to the sun when it rises in the morning, and sing sweetly again after they have been fed by their mother earth, thus honoring their father the sun and their mother the earth.

Plants and birds do these things every single day. And so, also, we should give thanks to the Lord every day, for He is the real Father, the Heavenly Father, of each one of us. We should give thanks to Him and honor Him every day, for it is He who has made us, who feeds us and clothes us, and takes us at last into heaven when we die. It is for this reason that people say grace to the Lord before meals, thanking Him every day for all the good things He gives them. And this also is the reason we have set aside a special day each year as a day of thanksgiving, a yearly sign of our deep and humble thanks to the Lord.

On this day each year, those of us who can do so come into the Lord’s house (the church) for a special service of praise to Him. And on this day we bring Him an offering of fruit as a way of giving thanks. This was done in very ancient times. Then, when all people were farmers, they took some of the very first fruits they raised each year and sacrificed them to the Lord. So, too, with us. Most of us are not farmers now, but with money we earn we buy fruit to sacrifice it to the Lord. And we do sacrifice it, too, for to “sacrifice” means to “make holy.” It does not mean to burn something up, or even to give it up; it

means to make a thing holy. And so we, too, sacrifice this fruit—make it holy—by offering it to the Lord’s will. We know, of course, that the Lord does not need this food to eat. But we take the fruit that we could eat ourselves and bring it into the house of the Lord so that it may be given to the sick and needy, whom the Lord has told us to help. And whenever we do what the Lord wants us to do with a thing, we make it holy or sacrifice it. And so this has become our custom each year as a way of thanksgiving to the Lord.

But perhaps you sometimes wonder why you should give thanks to the Lord at all. You may think: “Don’t we have to work for our living? Don’t we have to grow our own food and cook it? Don’t we have to build our houses? Don’t we have to make our clothes, or else work to make money to buy them?” “Why, then,” you may ask, “should we thank the Lord for these things?”

Yes, it is true that we have to plant the seeds in the earth, water our gardens, weed our vegetables, and bring them into the house to cook them. But who made the seeds? Who made the earth and the water? Who gave us wisdom enough to take care of the growing plants, and bodies strong enough to do that work? And who, alone, makes the seeds grow into plants that bear fruit, once we have put them into the ground? Only the Lord can do these things, all of them.

So, also, we have to build and sew. But it is the Lord alone who makes the sheep from which we get wool for our clothes. And it is He who makes the plants grow for our cotton, and trees for our wood. No one but the Lord put into the ground the iron and stone with which we build. And, again, it is the Lord alone who gives us the wisdom and strength to build and sew.

Really all that we do is *help* the Lord to give us the things we need and want. And, strangely enough, when you think about it you can easily see that the main reason we thank the Lord is for just that—for letting us help Him, for letting us work. But unless you do think about it, that may not sound like much to be thankful for. Even in the Psalm that we read, only one little place mentions how wonderful it is that the Lord has made the world in such a way that we can work in it. But that is really the most wonderful thing of all!

For our lives would be very, very sad if we had no work to do and all we could do was play. Of course, at first we might enjoy ourselves that way. But think a little. During our summer vacations we have a very good time at first. Then, after a month or so, we find we are tired of this or that game or play. And, finally, by the end of vacation, we are usually quite anxious, really, to get back to school. Think about that a bit, and you will see why. In the beginning of vacation you have just been working and so you enjoy your play, but when you have not worked for a long time even play gets boring. That is why you usually have such a good time at recess, or after school, or after you have finished your work at home on Saturdays—because you have been working.

This is why the Lord made us in such a way that we would have to work for our living. He knew we could not be happy otherwise, because He knew that there is really only one thing that gives people true happiness—the happiness of heaven—and that is being useful. So He made us in such a way that we would have to work. For He has only one wish for us all, to make us truly happy.

Now, when you are children, you may enjoy playing more than anything else. But even you can see that you enjoy your play the most after you have been working at something useful. And when you grow up you will be able to see, and really believe, that working—being useful—gives you more happiness than anything else, far more than just playing. Indeed, when you become angels in heaven you will not even be able to be happy unless you can be useful to others. That, then, will give you the greatest delight ever.

And, so, on Thanksgiving Day, when we think of all the things for which we can give thanks to the Lord, we should not forget to thank Him for the greatest blessing of all: the right to help Him, the right to work, the right to be useful to our neighbors and to ourselves. For the more we think of that, and the more we see that it is true, the closer we come to heaven, where we will go after death and where every day is a day of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord. *Amen.*

True Christian Religion 308:

It must be grasped that there proceeds constantly from the Lord a Divine sphere of heavenly love towards all who embrace the teaching of His church, and who, just as children in the world obey their father and mother, obey Him, are attached to Him, and seek food, that is, instruction from Him. This heavenly sphere is the origin of the natural sphere of love towards infants and children. This is extremely universal, affecting not only human beings but also birds and beasts, even down to snakes; and not only animate creatures, but even inanimate objects. But the Lord, in order to work on these as He does on spiritual things, created the sun to be a sort of father in the natural world, and the earth to be a sort of mother. For the sun is so to speak the common father, and the earth the common mother, from whose marriage spring all the products of germination which adorn the earth's surface. The action of that heavenly sphere on the natural world produces those wonderful developments of plants from seed to fruit and to new seeds. That too is why there are many kinds of plants which by day turn their faces, so to speak, towards the sun, and turn them away when the sun sets. That too is why there are flowers which open as the sun rises and close as it sets. That too is why song birds sing sweetly in the early morning, and likewise when they have been fed by mother earth. So it is that all these things honor their father and their mother. All of these occurrences are evidence that the Lord, by means of the sun and the earth in the natural world, provides all necessities for living creatures and for inanimate matter.