

Homily offered by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Thanksgiving Eve, November 21, 2018.

Thanksgiving is perhaps the most straightforward holiday that the secular calendar knows. And it is also the most straightforward holy day that the Church calendar knows. The lesson from Deuteronomy (**Deuteronomy 8:7-18**) reminds us not forget all the blessings of the Lord our God. Tonight, especially, we remember.

For people without religious persuasion, the reasons to give thanks can be many. Good job, good health, lovely family, bright future. You don't need to be a God-fearing person to appreciate these good fortunes.

But what if one's fortunes are mixed? What if one is without work, recently diagnosed, separated from loved ones for whatever reason, including death, and with little hope for the future. Where does one find the courage, the energy, and the hope to say thank you. And to whom does one say it?

You and I come to the altar tonight with a mixed bag of fortune. Chances are that there are some really good things for which to be grateful, and some really problematic things.

But we have a place to go with all of this, where we recognize a God who encourages this offering. There is an altar that we trust. And, more to the point, there is a God behind that altar with arms open, welcoming all the good and all the not-so-good.

This God knows the not-so-good in ways we cannot imagine. The weight of the world is pretty heavy at any given point. Never mind the weight of all the other celestial bodies. It was very heavy at the Crucifixion. Which makes God's love in the Resurrection all the more remarkable. St. Paul (**2 Corinthians 9:6-15**) speaks of this love as an "indefinable gift."

Like many of you, we have had the good fortune of growing up in Christian households, and we have the good fortune right now of being part of a really special worshipping community. It's hard to picture living day to day, month to month, year to year, without those blessings.

So, yes, there is good fortune without reference to God, but there is far greater fortune when we acknowledge God, and thank Him for all our blessings, especially for His Son Jesus.

Through good and ill, this God is present, always welcoming and always with new opportunities to say thank you. Remember the leper in this evening's gospel **(Luke 17:11-19)**: "When he saw that he was healed, he turned back, and praised God with a loud voice."

We do so tonight by sharing in God's Thanksgiving Meal. It's pretty simple in outward terms – a little bread and a little wine – but deeply moving on the inside.

There are many people to thank for all sorts of things. But we begin with and end with the One who Saves. So, here's to you, Lord God. Thank you, very, very much.

Amen.