

**Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez on Thanksgiving Day
At Holy Family Parish, Williston, Florida
November 22, 2012**

Text Luke 17, 11-19

Parents teach their children to have good manners. At the table, you learn to say often: Thank you.

It is more than good manners. Saying thanks recognizes a deeper reality...All, everything is gift, all goods come ultimately from one source: God.

All what we have ...is all that has been given.

One of our illusions is to think: this is mine. The truth is that I do not own anything for all belongs to God, who is the author of all things. We need givers but givers who are fully aware that they are stewards of God's gifts.

Immigrants know that thanksgiving is a most American celebration. It touches everyone in this vast country.

America the beautiful fits here: the family gathers for a meal as all other families are doing also creating a real solidarity in society at large. The family prays in gratitude for all blessings. Those who are far that day feel close or at least less distant from one another. The country becomes that day a huge multiplication of families united in a magnificent family ritual.

Historian Michael Gannon has written that the first thanksgiving took place 40 years before what our books tell us. On Sept. 8, 1565 a Mass was first celebrated in this Diocese of St. Augustine. Another name for the Mass is Eucharist. It means I give thanks. In that unforgettable Mass, a portion of the First Nation, the Native Americans joined the recently arrived Europeans in a peaceful exchange of gifts in praise to God.

It makes so much sense to begin the family celebration of thanksgiving with the parish Eucharist. The Gospel tells us a thanksgiving story. Jesus heals 10 lepers yet one who has a most grateful heart comes back alone to throw himself at the feet of the Master expressing deep feelings of amazing recognition toward the Savior. Jesus, the great evangelizer, draws some lessons for his audience. He takes note that the one who came was from a group that was despised by the majority. In today's context one would figure it could be an illegal, or a former prisoner, or a homeless person. Jesus praises him for his gratitude. A gift the other nine did not show. What Jesus implies is that gratitude does not come easily to us but it requires cultivation, sensitivity and awareness.

It is worth noting that in Spanish the word thanks is translated as gracias. Grace in the Scriptures is the term used for gifts that come freely from God. In French, thanks is translated by Merci.

Mercy comes from misericordia, which refers to the love of God for us, a love St. Paul qualifies as rich. Thanks, gracias, Merci: each reveals a reference to God Who is the source of all goodness.

The Cure of Ars, St. John Maria Vianney said often, “quil’est bon le bon Dieu.” How good is the good Lord? His saying tells it as it is...Thanksgiving Day is a gift from the good God who is worthy of all thanks.