

St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

160 Court Street, Buffalo, New York

TRADITIONALLY SPEAKING by S. Casarotto, CS 11/30/08

THANKSGIVING

Introducing the Eucharistic Prayer (Preface), the priest says: *“Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God”* and the faithful respond: *“It is right to give You thanks and praise.”* And priest urges on: *“It is right to praise Him always and everywhere!”*

St. Francis of Assisi used to say *“Tutto e’ grazia!”* Everything is God’s gift. The self-made man does not know why or how to give thanks. We think that everything is the fruit of our genius and work. We do not owe anything to anybody and what we have nobody should touch. We forget that other people have worked for what we have and often the natural resources we use are cheaply taken away from other countries.

In the Gospel we are told about the ten lepers who were cured by the Lord and only one went back to thank Him. Jesus noted the ingratitude of the other nine. Why did they not go back to thank the Lord? Could it be that they thought that good health and the full use of their faculties were “owed” to them?

We take many things for granted: our life, our health, our job, our friends and even our family. We are not grateful. We do not know how to show that we are grateful. We often complain about what we do not have because we feel we must surround ourselves with many comforts for prestige and security. We want to be like the Joneses. We buy and throw away, buy more and waste more.

And we buy everything on credit. Presently, the bailouts and the promised economic reforms are accumulating a national debt equal to the number of dollars which, if aligned one next to the other, will circle the world 3,891 times. That is a lot of change!

A monk in the desert was thirsty and lowered his bucket into his well to draw some water. When the bucket came up, it was filled with nuggets of precious gold. But the gold could not quench his thirst, and the monk emptied the gold out into the sand. Again he lowered his bucket and this time it came up filled with fine silver. But the silver could not quench his thirst and he flung it away with disdain. For a moment the monk prayed to God, the giver of all good gifts, and then he lowered the bucket a third time. When he drew the bucket up this time, it was brimming with cool water and the monk drank and gave thanks to God.

Jesus told us to ask the Father “our daily bread“ and to trust Him who provides food to the birds of the air and dresses up with beautiful colors the flowers in the field. Let us be thankful for all our blessings and be a blessing to others. And live simply.

NO DISTRACTIONS -

A Franciscan was preaching one day in a country town, trying to teach the farmers the importance of devout prayer. "It is very difficult to pray without any distraction - said the preacher - We are always tempted to think about something else!" One farmer challenged the preacher. "When I pray - he said - I only think about God. I can say so many prayers just focusing my mind on God!" "Really? That’s great! - said the preacher - If you say the Our Father without any distraction, I will give you my donkey." "That's easy!" said the farmer and started his prayer. "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..." Then the farmer stopped and asked, "Father, are you going to give me the saddle too?"

December in Pagan Rome: *Nihil novi sub sole! Nothing new under the sun!*

Toward the end of December, the Romans celebrated Saturn, the god of the sea, with a great festival called Saturnalia.

Seneca the Younger wrote about Rome during Saturnalia festivities around AD 50.

“It is now the month of December, when the greatest part of the city is in a bustle. Loose reins are given to public dissipation; everywhere you may hear the sound of great preparations, as if there were some real difference between the days devoted to Saturn and those for transacting business....” (Sen. epist. 18,1-2):

The poet Catullus describes Saturnalia, as the best of days (Cat. 14.15). It was a time of celebration, visits to friends, and gift-giving, particularly of wax candles (*cerei*), and earthenware figurines (*sigillaria*).

Martial’s Epigrams Book 14 (circa AD 84 or 85) is a series of poems each based on likely Saturnalia gifts, some expensive, some very cheap. For example: writing tablets, dice, knuckle bones, moneyboxes, combs, toothpicks, a hat, a hunting knife, an axe, various lamps, balls, perfumes, pipes, a pig, a sausage, a parrot, tables, cups, spoons, items of clothing, statues, masks, books, and pets.

Macrobius wrote:

“Meanwhile the head of the slave household, whose responsibility it was to offer sacrifice to the Penates (household gods), to manage the provisions and to direct the activities of the domestic servants, came to tell his master that the household had feasted according to the annual ritual custom. For at this festival, in houses that keep to proper religious usage, they first of all honor the slaves with a dinner prepared as if for the master; and only afterwards is the table set again for the head of the household. So, then, the chief slave came in to announce the time of dinner and to summon the masters to the table.” (Saturnalia I.24.23)

Granted, there were no electronic gadgets in those days, but Romans were practical people. They knew how to celebrate and offer very useful gifts without buying, as someone said, “things we don’t need with money we don’t have.”