

Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 2008, Liturgical Year "A"  
**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY**  
The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

*"Thanksgiving or Thanksliving?"*

**HAPPY THANKSGIVING!**

Today is thanksgiving - a day our nation sets aside to gather together with family and friends, to enjoy great food, and to give thanks. And many throughout our land say, "Oh we're so thankful and they eat a big meal and watch football and they have a grand old time." My friends, that's not thanksgiving. That's the holiday we call thanksgiving.

The whole purpose of Thanksgiving is to give thanks to Almighty God for the blessings He has bestowed upon us. That is why the Pilgrims had their first thanksgiving at Plymouth in 1621. It is why President George Washington called for a national day of Thanksgiving in 1789. And why in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln decreed that there would be an annual national day of Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of every November.

Now for those of us who are Christians, it is a day to thank God not just for His provision but also for our salvation: God the Father, giving Jesus Christ, His Son to die for our sins and to show us the way to eternal life. In fact, the second half of our church service known as the Holy Communion begins with the prayer we call the Great Thanksgiving. Holy Eucharist is from the Greek word, *eucharisto*, which means "to give thanks." We do this every Sunday and Holy Day. And it is one of the reasons why I am an Anglican – we climax the service with giving thanks for Jesus – His life, His death, His resurrection and His promised return, and then close by partaking of a thanksgiving meal – His body and blood.

And so Thanksgiving really needs to include more than saying a little prayer, stuffing yourself with lots of food and then becoming a couch potato. We need to make sure that our lives reflect an attitude of thanksgiving. In other words, we need to turn our thanksgiving into thanks-living.

**THANKSGIVING SACRIFICES**

And how do we do that? Please turn with me to **Psalm 107:21:22**: *"Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for His wonderful works to mankind. And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy."*

How do we make sure our thanksgiving is really thanksgiving? By offering the thanksgiving sacrifices. **1 Peter 2:9** says that all who are saved are priests: *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood..."* Now I am a priest in the Christ's One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. But before the Lord we technically are all priests. All of those of us who are saved are priests of God, and as priests we are able to offer sacrifices to the Lord. St. Peter tells us in verse 5, *"to let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ."* Therefore, because we're priests, we're to offer up spiritual sacrifices.

And if you go through God's word, you will find five spiritual sacrifices that we should offer to the Lord all this week and the rest of our lives. They are what I would like to call the sacrifices of thanksgiving. Sacrifices that we are to give back to God in response to His blessings.

**THE SACRIFICE OF OUR PERSON**

So what is the first sacrifice of thanksgiving? Please turn to **Romans 12:1**: *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which is your spiritual service."*

Now notice Paul talks about a living sacrifice. The very first sacrifice we are to offer is a living sacrifice, which is our body. And we know that Paul is very serious here. He says *"I appeal to you."* That means in the most

unequivocal terms you must do this. Why?

Why should I give my body to the Lord? Because He gave His body for us. He suffered, He bled and died upon that cross, and when we drove those nails into His hands, His pierced heart He still was saying "I love you." All of Romans, chapter one right on up to chapter twelve, tells us about the mercies of God, and then the apostle Paul says, "*I appeal to you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.*"

Now, that's the reason for it, but what is the requirement of it? How must I give myself to Him?

We must do it voluntarily. Nobody can make you do it. Do you see the word "present?" That's the word for a man joining an army voluntarily. Now, there are two ways to get in the army. You can go down and present yourself or they can draft you. Paul is telling us to present ourselves. He is telling us to volunteer. Thus, we are to present ourselves willingly.

Second, not only must we do it willingly, but we must do it completely. Notice Paul says that the body we present should be holy and acceptable. To be holy, means to be set apart for a specific purpose. It means to be totally devoted to what God wants. And so that means we are to give ourselves not just voluntarily but completely.

A sacrifice doesn't have any more plans of its own, a sacrifice will be slain. In fact, we're to die to the old way. My spouse, my children, my home, my car, my bank account, my ambitions, they all belong to the Lord. Have you done that? Have you just said here Lord, I give myself away, that's all I can do, and I do it completely, I do it voluntarily, but let me tell you something else about a sacrifice. The Old Testament animal sacrifice, after it was slain it was bound to the altar. God said bind the sacrifice to the altar. Do you know why it was bound to the altar? Because it had a tendency to slide off.

Have you ever picked up a piece of freshly killed meat? It's slippery, isn't it? That's why there were two flesh hooks on the altar and those flesh hooks would bind that sacrifice to the altar. Have you ever made a commitment to the Lord and then you end up sliding off the altar? I have. I mean, I've told the Lord, "Lord, that's the last time I'll ever do that," or "Lord, from now on I'm going to do this everyday. God, you can count on me," but then I just kind of slide off the altar. Do you ever slide off the altar? You see we need to be bound to the altar if we're going to be a living sacrifice.

And what are the two flesh hooks that will keep you bound to the altar? Number one is devotion, your love for Jesus, and number two is discipline, remaining faithful to Jesus. Those are the two flesh hooks that will keep you on the altar, devotion and discipline. One is not a substitute for the other, but together they'll keep you bound to that altar so that you will stay locked in place, a living sacrifice, giving yourself to the Lord.

And let's fact it, the truth is many times we don't want to be bound to God's altar because we are afraid of commitment. That's the reason some men and women don't get married. They don't want to get bound down to marriage? They want to stay free, they want to be loose. That's the reason why some

people won't join a church. They love to drop in and visit but they don't want the responsibility of church membership.

That's the reason why some people won't commit to be a part of a ministry in the church. They say, "Well now look, I just don't believe in making commitment." Well, is that right? They're married, they've got a mortgage on the house, a mortgage on the car, but they don't believe in making commitments. What they mean is they believe in making commitments to everybody else except for Jesus Christ.

Alright now, let me mention another kind of a sacrifice.

### **THE SACRIFICE OF OUR PRAISE**

Turn with me to **Hebrews 13:15**: *"Through Him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God."* Have you ever thought of your praise as being a sacrifice? That is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks and praise to His name.

You see God desires our praise more than He desires our money. Your praise is even of more value to God than whatever you put in the offering plate this morning, that is, if it is genuine praise. Listen for a moment to **Psalm 69:30-31**: *"I will praise the name of God with a song and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or a bullock that have horns and hooves."*

Do you know how much an ox was worth in that day? It would be like going and saying, "I'm going to give my car. I'm going to give my Cadillac or I'm going to give my Dodge pick-up." An ox was extremely valuable. A man who had an ox was a wealthy man, but God says that our praise pleases the Lord more than our material gifts. Now, I am not saying that praise is a substitute for our material gifts, but it is crucial to our walk with the Lord.

Look at our verse again. Notice how often we are to do it. Continually. You do not come to church to praise the Lord. You're to bring your praise with you to church. You don't commence your praise here. You continue your praise here. You are to praise the Lord continually, and the reason that some of us do such a poor job of praising God when we come to church to praise Him corporately is we haven't been praising him privately.

### **THE SACRIFICE OF OUR PRAYER**

Now, what's the third sacrifice? It is related to praise but it is not exactly the same. **Psalm 141:2** tells us: *"Let my prayer be counted as incense before you and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."* There's our word sacrifice again.

You see our prayer is to be like two things. Number one, it is to be like incense, and number two, it is to be like the evening sacrifice. Now, what does this mean? What is incense? Incense is perfume that, in order for that perfume to be released, it has to be put on the fire. It is burned, and as it is burned, the aroma is perfume that just goes up in smoke. Revelation 5:8 says that the prayers of the saints is like incense rising up to God.

In the Old Testament the Jews worshipped in the tabernacle, and if you were to walk in the front door of the tabernacle, you would see the altar of incense. There the priests would burn incense to the Lord in the morning and at night. There was also in that outer court a great altar made of brass that was called the brazen altar. There a lamb would be sacrificed once in the morning and once in the evening.

These animal sacrifices foreshadowed the sacrifice Jesus would make for us. The point is clear, Jesus paved the way so that we could have a relationship with Him. In response we are to be in daily communication with the Lord, morning and night. If we are truly thankful we will be speaking and listening to the Lord in prayer. Remember you are a priest. Did you offer any incense this morning? Have you offered the sacrifice of prayer? **Psalm 141:2**, *"Let my prayer be counted as incense before you and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice."*

### **THE SACRIFICE OF OUR POSSESSIONS**

Now what is the fourth sacrifice? **Hebrews 13:15** speaks of the sacrifice of praise. **Heb. 13:16** speaks of another sacrifice: *"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."* It means to take our material possessions, the things that God has given us and offer them as a spiritual sacrifice.

And so, if you really want to show your thanksgiving, show it in your giving. The truth is our giving really shows what we think of God. There are some folks who come to church on Sunday and they give God a tip. They

give God the crumbs. They give God the leftovers. Do you know what a lot of folks do? They have their budget, they get the budget out and they say alright, we've got so much for the house payment. We've got to pay that. So much for the utilities, we have to pay that. So much for the car payment, we've got to pay that. So much for groceries, we've got to pay that. So much for the Sears card, we've got to pay that. And so on. So they've got all these things they have to pay, and then they say, now what's left? Do we have anything to give God?

What's left? Do you know what you ought to do? Before you write a check to anybody or anything else, you ought to make a gift to Jesus first. Do you know what the Bible says? **Proverbs 3:9: "Honor the Lord with the first fruits of your increase."** First fruits, not what's left. Don't give God the crumbs. Don't give God the leftovers. Don't see if there's anything left for God. That's the problem. God doesn't want a place in your life. He wants all of your life.

You see we don't just give to the church because the church needs it. We don't give to a cause. It's supposed to be a sacrifice to God. Friends, if there wasn't a need in this world, and if we just took the money that was given on Sunday and burned it up, I mean, just put in a furnace and burned it up, it'd still be a blessing just to come and give it. Do you believe that? I do.

That's what they did with the Old Testament sacrifices, they burned them up. They weren't giving to a need, they were giving to God. It was put on an altar and it was consumed. It didn't serve any utilitarian purpose. They were giving it to God. That's why the Bible says in **2 Cor. 9:7, "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver"**. That is, you're not giving to a cause. You're not giving because somebody has made you do it, you're not giving grudgingly, or out of necessity, but to the Lord!

### **THE SACRIFICE OF PURITY**

Finally, the fifth and last sacrifice is the sacrifice of a broken and a contrite spirit, which I want to call the sacrifice of purity. Listen for a moment to **Psalm 51:17. "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."** Do you have that sacrifice of a broken and a contrite spirit? Why do I call it the sacrifice of purity? Because David had sinned and what was it that broke David's heart? **His sin against God.** You see, God was so good, notice in **Psalm 51:1: "Have mercy upon me, Oh God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions."**

Do you know what it was that led David to a broken spirit? It was not David's badness, it was God's goodness. The Bible tells us over in Romans that it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance, not the badness of man. God is so good. How can we sin against such love? How can you this Thanksgiving, sin against one who suffered, bled and died for you? If you say you love him, then get rid of the sin that breaks His heart, get rid of it. A broken and a contrite spirit is the only way. Our sins were the nails that nailed Him to that tree and our hard hearts, the hammers that drove those nails, but a broken and contrite spirit, O God you will not despise.

And so on this Thanksgiving may we give to the Lord the sacrifices of thanksgiving: our person, our prayer, our praise, our possessions, and a pure life. May we give back to the Lord what He has already given to us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!