

*This Is the Day*  
*Deuteronomy 8:7-18; Psalm 118:19-24, 29*  
*November 20, 2011*

One afternoon a shopper at the local mall felt the need for a coffee break. She bought herself a little bag of cookies and put it in her shopping bag. She then got in line for coffee and found a place to sit at one of the crowded tables. Taking the lid off her coffee and taking out a magazine, she began to sip her coffee and read. Across the table from her a man sat reading a newspaper.

After a minute or two she reached out and took a cookie. As she did, the man seated across the table reached out and took one too. This put her off, but she did not say anything.

A few moments later she took another cookie. Once again the man did so too. Now she was getting a bit upset, but still she did not say anything.

After having a couple sips of coffee she once again took another cookie. So did the man. She was really upset by this – especially since now only one cookie was left. Apparently the man also realized that only one cookie was left. Before she could say anything, he took it, broke it in half, offered half to her, and proceeded to eat the other half himself. Then he smiled at her and, putting the paper under his arm, rose and walked off.

The woman was steamed! Her coffee break ruined, already thinking ahead of how she would tell this offense to her family, she folded her magazine, opened her shopping bag and there discovered her unopened bag of cookies! Oops! She had been eating the man's cookies, while her cookies were unopened in her shopping bag!<sup>1</sup>

This simple story reminds us of the generosity of God who is so gracious in sharing God's abundance, even though we may be neglecting God. It gives us pause to consider the gifts of God that we are taking for granted. Things are right in front of us or people are with us all the time and we grow so accustomed to their presence that we forget to acknowledge them. We expect them to be there to meet our needs and to serve us.

Not only do we take things or people for granted; we also forget where they come from and to whom they belong. We treat them as our own possessions, thinking that we are entitled to them. Aren't we? After all, didn't I buy my clothes and my car with the money I earned? Don't they belong to me? Don't I deserve them as a reward for all that hard work? We become angry and disgruntled when someone intrudes on our territory and threatens our turf, just as the woman got mad as the man ate what she thought were her cookies!

In Deuteronomy Moses is speaking to the Hebrew people, preparing them for the blessings they are to receive in the Promised Land. After many years of

slavery, they will enter into a good land, reap a bountiful harvest from the field, build fine houses, own herds and flocks, and possess silver and gold. In their prosperity they are warned not to be so quick to take credit for their success and forget God who gives them the power to become wealthy. They must not take what they have for granted, nor forget the sources of their blessings. They will not get far without the providence of God.

These verses speak so well of what we all know somewhere in our hearts, but often seem to forget in our actions and attitudes. They remind us that everything we have is a gift from God, a gift perhaps fashioned by our own hands, a gift even enhanced by our own strength, but a gift none-the-less, for God gives us the hands we need and the strength we have.

There is a strong temptation to credit our self-sufficiency, to forget God, to say to ourselves, “my strength and my ability have gotten me thus far in life,” and then to yearn for more, and to expect it as if it were our right and our privilege. We tend to forget God and to take credit for our growth and success. We take the place of God in our own lives and pride ourselves on self-achievement. We dare to think that God is no longer necessary in our lives.

There was a group of scientists who decided that humanity had come a long way and no longer needed God. So they picked one scientist to go and break the news to God. “We can clone humans now, so we don’t need you,” they said.

God listened very kindly, then suggested, “Why don’t we have a contest to see who can make the best human?”

“Great!” said the scientist.

“And we’re going to do this just like I did back in the old days with Eve and Adam,” said God.

“Sure, no problem,” said the scientist, and bent down and grabbed himself a handful of dirt.

“No, no, no,” said God. “You go get your own dirt!”

Everything, even the dirt of the field, is a gift from God. We mustn’t forget the Source of every living thing. We must remember that what we have is a gift and that life itself is a gift. G.K. Chesterton said, “When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.”

The Pilgrims in Plymouth in 1621 knew the difference between taking things for granted and taking them with gratitude. They gathered to give thanks because they had been able to construct some lean-tos that protected them from the weather. They gathered to give thanks because they had found kindness in their native neighbors. They gathered to give thanks because, although their crop of peas had failed and the barley crop was indifferent, they were able to harvest twenty acres of scrubby corn from the land. They gave thanks for these things, but they looked beyond those things to the God who stood behind them and all that

they had accomplished as pioneers in this uncharted promised land. If it hadn't been for the lean-tos and the few friendly folks and for the little bit of corn they were able to raise, they could not have survived. But they did survive and they were grateful, knowing that it was God who gave them strength to endure the hardships.

We, too, would not have what we do – the possessions, the relationships, the faith – were it not for God. We would not be alive if it were not for God. This is why we need to remember the verse of the Psalmist: “This is the day that the Lord has made.”

Who made this day? The Lord.

To whom does this day belong? The Lord.

Who is graciously gifting us with this new day? The Lord.

Whom shall we not forget this day? The Lord

Deuteronomy suggests that we eat our fill and bless the Lord for the good land that God has given us. Here's biblical justification for saying grace after meals instead of before! Whether it happens before or after a meal, blessing God is not an option. Giving thanks to God is the appropriate response to the gifts God bestows upon us.

Some of you might remember the old Ma and Pa Kettle television series. In a classic scene found in many episodes, Ma Kettle would bang the triangle on the porch and from every corner and crevice around the yard hordes of screaming, yelling children would pour into the house fighting for a place at the table. Then Ma, in her best stentorian tones would holler, “Hold it!” and everyone would freeze in silence. Pa Kettle would roll his eyes heavenward, tip his hat, and say, “Much obliged.” And immediately the melee began as abruptly as it had stopped.

God deserves much better than a mere tip of the hat. For the gift of this day, for the gift of life, God deserves not only our blessing and praise; God deserves that we live in ways that honor God. Christ has shown us how to live in obedience to God's way. God deserves not just thanks giving, but also thanks living. Lives lived with gratitude reflect the generosity of God. Lives lived with appreciation for gifts received multiply the blessings.

Thomas Merton wrote, “To be grateful is to recognize the Love of God in everything He has given us—and [God] has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of [God's] love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from [God]. Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder and to praise of the goodness of God. For the grateful [person] knows that God is good, not by hearsay but by experience. And that is what makes all the difference.”<sup>ii</sup>

Return to the story of the bag of cookies. Upon discovering that she had been eating the man's cookies and that her own bag of cookies was in her shopping bag, how might the woman have responded? She could go home, a bit embarrassed, and keep her cookies to herself. Recognizing her error, she might rush down the mall to find the man who so graciously shared his cookies with her, apologize, and give him her bag of cookies. Appreciating the grace given her, she might open her bag of cookies and share them with others as she walks through the mall, modeling the generosity that had quietly been showered upon her. In such a way she blesses God by blessing others. She rejoices by sharing the blessing.

This is the day the Lord has made. "When it comes to life, the critical thing is whether we take it for granted, or take it with gratitude." Let us receive the gift of this day and all the gifts of God with gratitude.

Loving God, we are humbled by the wealth of blessings which you lavish upon us. We reap the harvest of generations who have come before us, cultivating the land, forging the trails, building communities. Forgive us for taking so much for granted, for failing to recognize the gifts of those who have gone before and those who are around us this day. Awaken us to the bounty you have provided and to its source. Stir us toward thanks living with a deeper appreciation for your gifts.

We are mindful that far too many people are deprived of even a portion of the gifts we enjoy. Move your people toward an equitable sharing of the blessings of our nation and our world that all might know the richness of life. Renew the courage of those who struggle to make ends meet and provide bread for their family table. Empower those who long to use their talents and skills but find the opportunities lacking. Strengthen those who have become discouraged by all the closed doors. Help us to hear the cries of the poor and motivate us toward action on their behalf.

As friends and families gather for the holidays, we pray for safe travels. May your spirit of reconciliation be present where there has been hurt. May the bonds of family and friendships deepen. We remember those who will be separated from loved ones and pray that your presence would be a source of joy.

Abide with the troops who serve our nation around the world, offering them courage for their service and safety in their mission. Bless military families as they endure the hardships of deployment. Offer comfort to all who mourn the loss of loved ones and strength to veterans who return to cope with stress and injuries from their service.

Shed your wisdom upon leaders of our nations, states, and communities as they continue to wrestle with budget shortfalls. Remind us of our priorities as a nation and as people who belong to you. Move us to act upon our values that the needs of your people might be met.

Keep us focused on you, O God, on the bounty of your gifts and upon your call to honor you and our neighbor in all that we do. We lift our prayer in the name of the One who reveals your goodness and grace, Jesus Christ, and with him we pray....

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<sup>i</sup> Rev. Richard J. Fairchild, *Remembering to Give Thanks: Blessing God*, www.rockies.net.

<sup>ii</sup> Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956), p. 42.