

## Pastor's Corner

# Will you give thanks for hard things too

BY FR. THEOPHAN BUCK

It is a custom in many households to pause just before the Thanksgiving meal and to have each person around the table recount specific things that he is thankful for in the past year.

Most of us would have long lists: family around the table, a roof over our heads, food on the table, our overall needs being met; there are so many reasons for us to give thanks.

On the other hand, it would be downright shocking to hear thanks offered for newly diagnosed cancer, for the recent loss of their job, or for other major family calamities. These are things that in general people are not thankful for.

However, as Christians, Biblically speaking, we are called to be thankful for everything: the good, the bad, our blessings and curses. The New Testament is full of passages that imply that we should be thankful for all things. In Matthew 5, our Lord tells us that we are "blessed" when we are reviled, persecuted, and unjustly slandered for His name sake. I don't know about you, but I am not a

happy camper when reviled, persecuted or unjustly slandered. Yet, instead of defending ourselves, complaining, or despairing, our Lord tells us that we should "rejoice and be exceedingly glad" because our reward will be great in Heaven.

The Apostle Paul has a lot to say about being thankful for our tribulations. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16 the St. Paul tells us to "rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." He speaks this way again in Ephesians 5:20 when he tells us to "give thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul writes from prison: "Be

anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God"(Philippians 4:6).

From these passages and many more one would get the impression that the proper response to all that is given to us, whether we consider it positive or negative, is to give thanks to God. Being thankful in all things is "the Christian

thing to do." However, for most of us this is a fanciful religious platitude at best.

Why is it that we can only thank God for what we perceive as good and not for those things which cause us suffering? One reason is that our perspective is fallen and worldly; it is pragmatically based on the idea that real life is about pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Pain and suffering are often viewed as meaningless, alien parts of life which are to be avoided at any cost.

Another reason for our lack of thankfulness in hard times is that much of our suffering is caused because we have our own plans, desires and goals. Often times we take for granted the short life we have been given until we are rudely awakened by suffering, which lets us know that our plans do not dictate the movement of the cosmos around us.

The view of pain and suffering in the New Testament is very different than the fallen worldly perspective. Our Lord's example clearly teaches us that true life is not simply about pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain. The Lord that Christians follow was the man of many sorrows who was persecuted and then murdered in a most painful way; "who, when He was reviled, did not revile in

return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to who judges righteously"(1 Peter 2:23). Like our Lord, those of us who are Christians are asked to empty ourselves of our plans and desires and to put ourselves completely in God's hands with promise that "all things work together good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

Everything we receive comes from no matter what the secondary source be. All that is given by God is useful for our growth and salvation. The famous Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann wrote, "A Christian is that one who, wherever he looks, finds Christ and rejoices in Him." May God give us eyes to see and ears to hear so that we can find Christ in all things, even in suffering, so that we can appropriately give thanks for all things in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*The Pastor's Corner is sponsored by Monroe County Ministerial Association. Father Theophan Buck is the pastor of Innocent Orthodox Church in Bolingbroke.*



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