

It's kind of ironic that with separation of church and state in our country, today's annual civic holiday gets to the heart of our Catholic faith. We worship God in the Eucharist, that Greek word that means ... Thanksgiving! Every weekend we thank our heavenly Father for Jesus giving away his life for us as a sacrifice, so we can be reconciled with God and have eternal life.

In our Second Reading St. Paul talks about this, describing Jesus as the grace of God bestowed on us, and we're given fellowship with his Son Jesus, living with him forever. Eternal life is pure gift, our greatest gift, nothing we've earned.

Too many people celebrate this holiday incorrectly. They observe Thanks Day, not Thanksgiving Day. Thank God for the blessings we've received, but that's only half of it. Jesus's teachings insist that our gratitude be linked to giving, sharing those blessings we've received from God, that we're stewards of our time, talent and treasure. We're to be giving of them, share them with others.

That was the example of the first Thanksgiving Day. The Pilgrims thanked God for an abundant harvest, and to show their gratitude, they celebrated and shared a meal with their Native American neighbors, who had done nothing to produce the harvest. They didn't earn it; the Pilgrims gave them this meal.

Jesus is giving a thanksgiving message to the Samaritan in today's Gospel. By curing him of leprosy, he restored this man's whole life to him. The Samaritan had been banished from his family and village because of his skin disease. But now he can go home. Jesus orders him to go and share his life and gifts.

In the Psalms God says "a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me." Thanksgiving hurts, we're giving away something. But that's how we honor God. May the eucharist transform each of us into a living thanksgiving like Jesus.