

In the name of our loving and merciful Savior God, who ever gives us cause to thank and praise His holy name, dear fellow redeemed;

Ever since the annual observance of Thanksgiving Day began in our country, this festive holiday has been a special time for calling to remembrance the bountiful blessings that God has graciously bestowed upon us over the past year, and to give thanks and praise to Him for them. Concerning the many good and beneficial things that have come our way, we are reminded by the Word of God that, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights." (1:17) Holy Scripture also helps us to be mindful of the wondrous truth that God continues to give us these many gifts not because of any worthiness in us, but solely because of His unmerited love. God has been faithful is doing this each and every day of our lives. Knowing this, we would have to say that all through this past year the Lord God has richly and daily poured out upon us His many mercies both for our bodies and our souls.

Some of these blessings have been quite obvious to us. While others have not been so obvious. Since we are not fully aware of all the workings of God's providential dealings and His particular plan behind them, it would be safe for us to say that there are countless blessings of God that we are not aware of, even blessings in situations we would have least expected.

As we reflect on these many merciful kindnesses of God and think of our great unworthiness, our hearts are filled with feelings of joy and gladness, prompting us to speak and to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, giving thanks and praise to God. We offer up these words of praise and thanksgiving in Jesus' name, for we know that all of God's blessings are gifts that have been given to us account of our loving Savior and Redeemer Jesus Christ. Jesus' redemptive work has caused God to look upon us with favor instead of disfavor, and to pour out His blessings upon us rather than to pour out His well deserved wrath. Also, we speak and sing the praises of God, trusting that He always has our highest good in mind, as He daily cares for us according to His heavenly wisdom.

This spirit of joy in the Lord and thankfulness to God is not shared by everyone in this country on this festive day. Of those who have been struck by some kind of tragedy or hardship and have been unable to see God's gracious hand at work in their lives, they may feel as though they have nothing to be thankful to God for. People in the southeastern part of our country were pounded by one hurricane after another, wreaking massive destruction in their paths. Also, during this past year there have been torrential rains and heavy flooding in parts of our country, resulting in 85 people losing their lives and causing property damage and loss costing many billions of dollars. Besides this, there were undoubtedly many other lesser known personal, individual adversities that may have caused some to wonder what they have to be thankful about on this day.

An example of a negative kind of thinking that has been heard in our country is the blasphemous idea by one man who said that if Americans are going to devote a day of thanksgiving to God for the good and desirable things, then it is only fair and fitting to follow it with a national day of blaming God. Based on spiritually blind reasoning, this

scoffer declares that God should be blamed for either causing or refusing to prevent natural catastrophes, that He should be blamed for either causing or refusing to prevent deadly and devastating diseases, and that He should be blamed for hardening the hearts of muggers, rapists, murderers, war mongers, and various other mischief makers. And the man goes on with his list of blaming God for the many other ills that afflict people in our country and through out the world. This individual seems to have somewhat of a kindred spirit with Job's wife, who after she saw her husband hit with one disaster after another, she said to Job, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die." (Job 2:9) However, Job having a better understanding of the ways of God and a fervent love for the Lord replied to his wife, saying, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10)

In the face of the most dire physical conditions, the Holy Spirit helps us to behold God's hand of blessing in the difficulties we encounter. We know by faith that God causes all things to work out for our good. So then, even when conditions in life are not going so well, we trust that God is working behind the scenes, directing and overseeing our lives in such a way that it will serve for our welfare. And in response to this, with a humble and submissive spirit we can say to the Lord, thank you for watching out for me and for doing all things well for my benefit, even for my eternal good.

The following story is told that when the early colonists decided to observe a day of thanksgiving, they did so in spite of severe adverse conditions of life. "During the early days of our nation's history the colonists endured many deprivations and hardships. As a result, their hearts and minds were filled with gloom bordering on despair, and many were disposed to return to their fatherland with all of its persecutions. When they met to decide on a day for fasting and prayer, an old man who attended the meeting arose to address the assembly. He said that he thought that they had brooded long enough over their misfortune and that it seemed high time that they should consider their blessings instead. The colony was growing strong, he said. The harvests were becoming more plentiful, the rivers were full of fish and the woods with game, the air was sweet and the climate was pleasant. Above all, he reminded them that they now possessed what they had come for, full civil and religious liberty. Accordingly he recommended that they appoint a day for thanksgiving rather than a day for fasting. His advice was followed, and from that time forward Thanksgiving Day has been regarded a day of joy." (selected)

During the various natural disasters in our country the Lord mercifully protected and preserved the lives of many. For those who suffered loss He was faithful in providing for their most basic needs through different ways and means. There are also the unseen blessings of God using catastrophes to either cause unbelievers to seek after Him in order to find Him or to cause believers to become stronger in their Christian faith.

As children of God we not only humbly accept the adversities along with the good from God, but we also find cause to give thanks and praise to God under all circumstances and conditions of life. Chrysostom, a church father of the early Christian church, had as his motto, "God be praised for everything!" When in his old age he was removed from office, banished from his country, thrust into misery and abused, made to

flee and suffer hunger and pestilence, his dying words were, ‘God be praised for everything!’”

Pastor John Mentzer, a Christian hymn writer, had suffered many set backs and hardships, even the loss of all his possessions in a fire that destroyed his home, when he penned these beautiful words of praise to God:

Oh, that I had a thousand voices!
A mouth to speak with thousand tongues!
My heart which in the Lord rejoices,
Would then proclaim in grateful songs,
To all, wherever I might be,
What great things God hath done for me.

While our fellow citizens were faced with all manner of difficulties this past year, we can certainly point to many other blessings that God has mercifully and graciously granted this land. The Lord has blessed the harvests of America’s farmland with great bounty. It was forecasted that there would be record corn and soybean crops. Through the natural forces of nature the Lord has made it possible for our native land to produce more than enough food to not only feed all the citizens in our country, but also many others through out the world. Recent news reports have noted that many in our land have a problem with excess weight due to overeating, rather than having a problem with malnutrition due to having too little to eat. In spite of the high cost of groceries due to inflation, the Lord has still supplied us with our daily bread,

Surveying this land of ours we can truthfully say that our’s is a richly blessed nation, blessed with an abundance of natural resources and material goods, blessed with gifted and talented people who have benefitted their fellow citizens, and blessed with all manner of freedoms and liberties. And what is perhaps the most amazing and most merciful blessing of all is that the Lord has continued to preserve and make known His Word of life and salvation through Jesus Christ in this country even though our society has become increasingly more hostile to Christian beliefs and generally unresponsive to God’s call for them to forsake worldliness and turn to Him for guidance and salvation. Concerning this blessing from God, we can be truly thankful for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren, and for all those who would give heed to the Word of God. What great profit would it be for us to be one of the most prosperous and well fed nations in the world, but then have God visit our land with a famine of the Word of God, because people did not receive it with thanksgiving and praise to the Lord? From such a dreadful judgment may God continue to preserve our nation.

We are able to make melody in our hearts to the Lord and sing songs of praise and thanksgiving to Him in the good times, as well as in the bad, because we know by faith that the loving, merciful and gracious hand of God is ever at work in our lives to bless us.

We have learned from God’s Word that the Lord certainly doesn’t treat us according to what we justly deserve. We are reminded of this when Jeremiah writes in his inspired book, “Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.”

(Lam.3:22, 23) The psalmist also speaks of God's merciful and gracious dealings with us, as he says of the Lord, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him." (Ps. 103:10-13) Knowing the merciful ways of God, whenever we consider all the good things in life that the Lord blesses us with, we joyfully thank and praise Him, because all these things have been given to us by Him as a gift of pure grace.

In those times that the Lord would send or permit some trial or adversity to come our way, we know that God is not visiting us with His wrath or punishing us in His hot displeasure, because Jesus was punished for all of our misdeeds. On account of our Savior Jesus Christ, the Lord God looks upon us with delight and treats us with favor. Even the adversities are evidence of God's favor, for in His wisdom He uses them as a refining fire to purify our love for Him and to strengthen our faith.

When we then look back over the past year, we are prompted by the Spirit of God to thank and praise God for all things. And this we do in Jesus' name, as it is because of Him that God blesses us with His tender mercies and loving kindnesses both now and forevermore. May God be praised and thanked always for all things through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.