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A Time to Be Thankful and Say So

Back in the days when I was teaching at NDSCS, it would occasionally strike me that I had much to be thankful for. Yet at the same time there was a trio of mutterers that I couldn't spend ten minutes with before their complaining would begin to cloud up the sunny day I was enjoying. It was always the same litany of discontent, "Why do we have eighteen contact hours instead of twelve like they have over in the greener pastures state? Why are we paid \$20,000 less then over in Minnesota? How am I supposed to teach three separate preparations back to back? Why can't Dean X be more intelligent about his scheduling?" Predictably, all three found enough reasons to move away to greener pastures, which they discovered were mined with too many cow pies. Go figure.

The scriptures tell us to avoid whiners: "Blessed is the man who walketh not in the council of the ungodly, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and in that word he meditates day and night." Such a person "will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water whose leaf never withers." The children of Israel left Egypt protected and enriched by God's grace, but many soon complained their way into the destruction awaiting them as they forged their golden calf at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

These days the national nightly news is 90% bad and 10% so-so, giving many complainers ample reason to simply quit working, go on welfare and "chill" their way into old age and "the big chill."

So is there any antidote for this great malaise? Thankfully there is: Praise. We are told we have a God who “inhabits the praises of his people.” (Ps. 22:3) Once one gets that truth past his busy brain and into the light of the heart’s understanding, things of the Spirit brighten up fast. Here’s a little meditation I did a few years back when I discovered the magic of gratitude and praise:

“*An Invitation*” Holy Spirit make your home within my heart;/ Make the ramparts of my breath your banister./ Come and make yourself at home/ Make my easy chair your throne./ Let Messiah’s lovely fragrance/ Fill my home./

“Let the fragments of my fallen nature die;/ Rose of Sharon, my perfume, Come wafting by./ Bring to life God’s mighty word,/ Let each syllable be heard/ That my spirit might arise with His and fly.

Give me ears to hear sweet Spirit, ears to hear/ When Your lovely voice sings raptures to my soul./ Let each beautiful syllable/ Bring understanding rich and full/ And I no more let my darkness pull me down; As I rise on strains of Heaven’s uplifting Song./

How the entrance of God’s word brings in the Light./ Even as it did when great Isaiah sang:/ “Arise! Shine! for thy Light has come”/ And all the bells in God’s great kingdom rang/ And every angel raised his voice and sang./

In your presence, Lord, is fullness of great joy/ What a place to end my waning earthly years/ What a way to end my days/ In a sacrament of Praise/ Till only Joy and Joy alone/ Brings forth my tears;/ Only Joy and Joy alone shall crown my years.”

That little afternoon meditation back years ago came as I remembered the times during praise and worship services in those fairly normal (pre-covid) days, that the Presence of God “inhabiting our praise” was so weighty that people often fell out with the power of it.

A scripture tells us to “Put on the garment of praise/ *To fight* the spirit of heaviness;/ Lift up your voice and sing!” Don’t laugh. The idea once pervaded our culture, “Whenever I feel afraid/ I lift my head up high/ And whistle a happy tune/ So no one will believe I’m afraid.” (The King and I.)

And Johnny Appleseed was thankful too, “The Lord is good to me/ And so I thank the Lord/ For giving me the things I need/ The sun, the rain and the apple seed/ The Lord is good to me.”

Ingratitude is one of the greatest sins, especially if you’re an American with all the blessings of liberty our forefathers won for us. Shakespeare’s King Lear saw ingratitude in his two monster daughters who cast him out into a storm once they took over his kingdom, “Ingratitude, thou marble hearted fiend...Is it not as though this mouth should bite this hand for lifting food to it?”

Here is the truth that might free us from any foolish notion of earned entitlement, “Every good and perfect gift comes from above, coming down from the father of lights in whom there is no caprice nor shadow of turning.” There’s a name for our gifting: grace -- “How gracious is that grace of His, the day we first believe.”

Gene Pinkney For the Daily News

