

# Attitude of Gratitude

## Counting our Blessings



### Gratitude is the evidence of deep faith

To be thankful can seem rather difficult for most of us right now with the circuit breaker period and lockdown in many parts of the world during this Pandemic which no one knows when it will end.

If we are familiar with the Divine Office, at every morning (Lauds) and evening prayer (Vespers) there is a canticle with two psalms. What is a "canticle"? The word "canticle" (pronounced KAN-ti-kle) comes from the Latin word "cantus," which means "song."

**1**

#### BENEDICTUS

Morning Prayer  
(Lauds)

Canticle of Zachariah

**2**

#### MAGNIFICAT

Evening Prayer  
(Vespers)

Canticle of Mary

**3**

#### NUNC DIMITTIS

Night Prayer  
(Compline)

Canticle of Simeon



Let everything that  
breathes give  
praise to God  
(Psalm 150:6)



#### At the break of dawn...

"Lord, open my lips  
and we shall praise  
your name."

#### At Day break...



"O God, come to  
our aid. O Lord,  
make haste to help  
us."

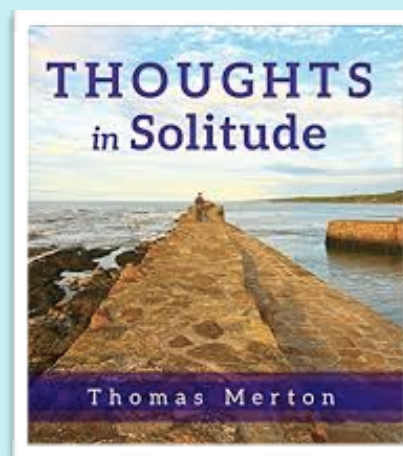
A canticle is a song based on a text from Holy Scripture. What could be better than to sing praises to God with the words He gives us? There are three canticles that are daily being prayed, morning, evening and night. They make a perfect end for each of the “Liturgy of Hours” (Divine Office). They grace us: **The Benedictus** in the morning at Lauds; **the Magnificat** in the evening at Vespers; the **Nunc Dimittis** or Cantic of Simeon as the last hour of prayer at night, or compline. Their repetition each day is like meeting an old friend; each recitation is a confirmation of that friendship. A canticle is, etymologically, a small song. Canticles have a long tradition in Jewish worship. The Benedictus, also known as the Cantic of Zechariah, is a father’s thanks for the gift of his son, John the Baptist. Some scholars say this canticle was added to the liturgy of the hours by St. Benedict of Nursia, who made the divine office a central part of Benedictine spirituality. Some have memorised the Benedictus by heart. There is something resounding about the opening: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and wrought redemption for his people.” We can imagine the joy with which Zechariah utters those words, after weeks when he could not speak.



The Magnificat is the Blessed Virgin’s grateful acceptance, expressed on a visit to her cousin Elizabeth, for the gift of Jesus. It, too, has a rhythm that can calm us at the close of each day. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour.” It is easy to imagine the young Jewish woman’s joyful but profound response to her cousin’s greeting. And when Mary says, “He has exalted the lowly, and the hungry he has filled with good things, while the rich he has sent empty away,” we could see this message as an anticipation of the Beatitudes.

### “I will remember the deeds of the Lord” (Psalm 77:11)

In *Thoughts in Solitude*, Thomas Merton speaks of **gratitude as the ability to recognise God in everything**. In a world that often seems to be coming unglued, it is reassuring, and even helps create a kind of inner order, to repeat a group of prayers that have been part of the Catholic tradition for almost 2,000 years.





**The Cantic of Simeon** (Nunc Dimittis) is a wise old man's expression of gratitude for having seen the coming of the Saviour. There is a continuity that Luke suggests between the Old Testament and the New; between the Judaic tradition and the developing prayer life of the early, mostly Jewish-born, Christians.

If we pay close attention, we see that Luke has each of the New Testament characters meet a character who resembles a figure in the Old Testament. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth are an aged couple yearning for a child, like Abraham and Sarah in Genesis. The angel Gabriel's revelation to Zechariah that Elizabeth will give birth to John, "*the prophet of the most high,*" is like the angel's promise to Abraham.

**The Magnificat** uses much the same language as does the Song of Hannah in the book of Samuel (1 Sam. 2:1-10). Jesus being presented to Simeon in the temple recalls the young Samuel being presented to Eli in the temple. Simeon's words herald the coming of the kingdom. He and Anna represent the *Anawim*, the poor and pious ones of God. For Luke, Anna represents the holy women of the early church. Luke's canticles are likely early

Christian hymns, woven from phrases and passages found in the Old Testament. In the mouths of Zechariah, Mary, and Simeon, these hymns express the **gospel attitudes** that early Christians sought to live out: **gratitude**, acceptance, joy - the same dispositions that we today should have when we pray.

Unlike other forms of coping that are more passive, reciting these prayers is neither passive nor unrealistic. **The canticles face the fact of misery, poverty, inequality, injustice, and yet still express gratitude.** They have been, in the words of the Nunc Dimittis, a "*light of revelation*" in a sometimes crazy world.




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**“My soul magnifies the Lord”**

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We remember the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the Book of Daniel Chapter 3 where these three men refused to bow down and worship the idol and god of Babylon. Then King Nebuchadnezzar had them thrown into the fiery furnace which was heated seven times hotter than normal. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had faith that God would save them.

When King Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fire he saw four men, instead of three men walking and dancing around in the furnace unharmed -

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and the Son of God. They were walking in the midst of the flame, **singing praises to God**, and blessing the Lord. And King Nebuchadnezzar heard them **singing praises**; and he wondered, and rose up in haste, and said to his nobles, did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? And they said to the king, Yes, O king. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego experienced the deliverance of God in a most personal way when the Lord delivered them.

What were they talking about while walking around that blazing furnace! Sometimes, we demand God's deliverance, threatening to give up our faith or questioning His goodness.



In Daniel 3, we see the faith of three young men who refused to swear allegiance to anyone except God. Even when faced with death threats, they remained steadfast.

In our most difficult time, we can take comfort that Jesus Himself is with us; in our sorrow and pain, our trouble and challenges, our trials and sicknesses. He has promised He will never leave or forsake us, (Hebrews 13:5) and He will be with us always, till the end of time. (Matthew 28:20) It is possible for us to come out of our furnace – unharmed, with no smell of the fire and our clothes and hair intact. He speaks to us through Scripture. But let the Word of God speak, instruct, guide, comfort, strengthen and build our faith whenever we find ourselves in the “furnace”.

#### ARE THERE MORE THINGS WE CAN BE GRATEFUL FOR DURING THIS COVID-19

More time for prayer

Family Bonding Time

A time to slow down

Online learning

Creative Arts

More solitude

Morning walks

Less noise

Reading more

Learning new things



God is sovereign; He is Master of our lives. We can trust Him to deliver us when we are in trouble, but if He doesn't, He is still Lord. He doesn't need to answer us; we answer to Him. He doesn't need to explain every situation to us. He is not obligated to tell us everything He is doing in our lives or ministry. He is God; we are not.

## What can we be thankful for today?

Recently there was a news report of a Filipino male nurse in UK, Kenneth Lambatan, a cheerful, fun-loving, life of the party who died from Covid-19 on 27 April 2020 at the age of 33. Many like him battling in the frontline died from this dreaded pandemic virus. Thankfulness doesn't always come naturally for us. Eric Hoffer put it beautifully, *"The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our blessings."*

A woman used to go to church, but after her husband left her for another woman, she questioned, *"What is there to give thanks for? This is not something I can celebrate."* Another family lost their daughter who is a nurse and their aged father during this Covid-19, and it shook their faith in God.

We are here today because we *did* stop to think and thank. We are here because we want to thank God and rejoice with songs and grateful prayers and declarations of what God has done for us. It may appear as if only those who believe in God are truly thankful – they are the only ones who have the capacity for it.

Mary Ann Vincent once wrote that, *"The atheist's most embarrassing moment is when he feels profoundly thankful for something, but can't find anyone to thank for it."*

So, let us never forget to thank God every day for all He has given to us. Though it could be hard when we are faced with trials and difficulties. But's that's life, isn't it? Maybe it's not that believers are grateful to God, but that those who are grateful to God are the ones who truly believe Him. Only those of us who are truly thankful are able to ride out the storms of life that might otherwise destroy us. Only those who have an **attitude of gratitude** know what it means to believe.

Thankfulness and faith go hand in hand. Our faith in God is not just a polite thanks for goodies and trinkets that God has given us. It's actually the other way around. To God, our thankfulness is the cornerstone of our Christian faith, because that is where faith begins, not where it ends. **Only the grateful believe**, and faith itself needs the strength of thankfulness to carry it through the dark night of the soul!

When the time comes for us to leave this earth, can we truly sing the Nunc Dimittis with conviction and hope. *"At last all powerful Master, you give leave to your servant to go in peace, according to your promise.."*, the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29–32) used as a canticle for the night prayer. **Can we dance and sing when we are in a tough situation?**

When we find ourselves in life's fiery furnaces, dance don't doubt. In the face of adversity, singing praises to the Lord is one way to 'wait on the Lord' and endure. Give God all the Glory, even when the circumstances we are in would cause those who only 'walk by sight' to fret. **Dance, don't doubt!**



# Thanksgiving

## Canticle from Jonah 2:2-9



### Gratitude to God

In a family of nine children and with only dad working, it was tough yet we always had food on the table. Mom would whip-up something with the simplest ingredients which would still be so tasty. I used to ask mom *"how come whatever you cook is so tasty"* and she replied that when you cook with love and thank God for His blessings, all will fall in place. From my younger days, I have always seen my mother praying no matter what the situation. A rosary is always in her hand when all her chores are done. She never miss Mass. Whenever there is a problem she will kneel down and pray. True enough the problem will be solved. Life was not easy for my mom but she never complained. Through all my trials and tribulations, her faith has inspired me to be true to God and trust Him in all situations. (Anonymous)

Being a single mother is a painful journey. It was not just about providing for my family but also sharing the pain of my children when they were ridiculed as being fatherless by their friends. Once my son told me *"what's the big deal about having a Father in Heaven when everyone also has a Father in Heaven but not everyone has a father on earth"* and this person had to be him. I had no answer for him. All I could do is to pray. To be a single mother also means one has to talk to our growing children about puberty and relationship but it is always never enough because the inner secret emotions of a male is not to be found on the internet. After realising that all I could do is to pray in my situation, my relationship with Mother Mary and God strengthened. I started on my journey to trust God more and to rely on Mother Mary's intercession. They have become so real to me and I hope my children can also find this relationship with God (God willing), through an easier route. (Anonymous)

As the story of **Jonah** unfolds, the short story carries a big **message**. The power of God's word and grace can change the direction of one life as well as many, many lives. It is ironic that a short story has such a big impact, from an individual life to many lives... all changing dramatically

**"The moral of the story of Jonah and the big fish, sometimes referred to as a whale, is that a person cannot run away from God's plans"**

One day Thomas Edison came home and gave a paper to his mother. He told her, *"My teacher gave this paper to me and told me to only give it to my mother."* His mother's eyes were tearful as she read the letter out loud to her child, *"Your son is a genius. This school is too small for him and doesn't have enough good teachers for training him. Please teach him yourself."* Many years after Edison's mother had died, Edison had become one of the greatest inventors of the century. One day he was going through the old closet and he found a folded letter which was given to him by his teacher for his mother. He opened it. The message written on the letter was, *"Your son is mentally ill. We cannot let him attend our school anymore. He is expelled."* Edison became emotional reading it and then he wrote in his diary, *"Thomas Alva Edison was a mentally ill child whose mother turned him into the genius of the century."*

**Moral:** A Mother's love and upbringing can help change the destiny of a child.

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