

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you oh God, my strength and my joy... Amen.

I'm not sure what your favorite thing about Thanksgiving is, but my dad's parents, especially my grandma, loved the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. They would call us every Thanksgiving morning when it started and joyfully shout into the phone... The parade has started hooray!

Thanksgiving was usually held at my parent's house, and so my grandparents wouldn't come over until the afternoon, as the morning time was their own front row seats to the parade, watching it on their tv in their living room.

So, one year, my Uncle, thought it would be fun for all of us to have our very own Thanksgiving Parade...

We cheered and yelled and played random musical instruments as we marched, danced, and leaped from my parents dining room, into the kitchen, into the living room, and back into the dining room, as their floor layout is like a loop.

It was such a rejoiceful memory that lives in my heart, and usually creeps out at this time of year... But I couldn't help but notice how well this memory paired with our reading from Philippians today... As we heard, the command to "Rejoice in the Lord always!"

And even though my family and I might not have been rejoicing in the Lord specifically during our parade, we were rejoicing with one another and God was definitely with us in that space.

Which I am truly grateful for, as this is no longer possible for us to do... As both my dad's parents, one of his sister, and one of his brothers have all passed...

Making Thanksgiving a harder holiday than it used to be in my care-free kid years.

And I know that for many, that this time of year, with as much joy as it brings, can also bring anxiety and stress.

Anxiety of course on numerous levels... There is the heavy anxiety for those of you who are experiencing the first holiday without a loved one...

To the anxiety of, is the food going to turn out okay?!

Or...Will I get my house cleaned in time?

To the anxiety of traveling, and especially this time of year, wondering how cooperative the weather may or may not be...

And then of course there is the anxiety and stress, caused by our topsy-turvy economy, high gas prices, with grocery prices skyrocketing.

And just hearing all of these things can be enough to make a person's blood pressure rise...

So now that I have stressed you all out, let us return again to our reading from Philippians... I invite you all to take a deep breath and to hear these words.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Showing us that God can and God will fill you with peace.

And to see this in action... All we have to do, especially those of us here in the Midwest, is to look outside...

As this is the time of year when peace becomes embodied in the earth.

When the earth shows us how important it is to slow down and wait.

A time when darkness blankets most of our days, inviting us into the quietness of night, away from the neon lights.

And since we are all also of this earth, we too are invited to follow this rhythm.

And following this rhythm can even lead to more joy...

The joy that we see in the winter creatures who don't hibernate or migrate, as this is their time to thrive.

Joy that is found in resting and waiting, knowing that spring always comes.

Joy in being able to sleep in and still watch a beautiful sunrise.

Joy found in the gorgeous hoarfrost.

Showing that joy can be encapsulated and frozen in peaceful moments.

Joy that can lead to rejoicing, rejoicing that invites thanksgiving to God.

Because when you go to God in prayer in thanksgiving, you will be amazed at what God can cultivate in you...

After all it is the week of thanksgiving, and what a better time than now to start this practice...

Setting aside time to pray for what is troubling you, and also setting aside time to acknowledge what you are thankful for.

To acknowledge what you are thankful for... Now, I know that this is a common thanksgiving tradition, at least for my family, as every year we go around the table and share at least one thing we are thankful for...

And to stay true to that tradition, I would be remiss if I didn't share how thankful I am for each one of you. For your faith, your spiritual gifts, and the love you share with one another and with me.

However, I also know that for some of you, that you have lost loved ones, and that the holidays can be hard, and hearing all of this talk of joy can be hard to relate to...

So, with that in mind, this year, I would like to propose a new tradition for you to try out...

To take the time and share with one another what you are thankful for, from the loved one or loved ones you are missing...

It could be a memory, a habit they had, a phrase they said, or the way they smelled...

Because we can always be thankful for them. For even though they are not physically on this earth anymore, they are always a part of us.

And even though they may no longer join your thanksgiving feast, they are still being fed.

As Christ promised, that all who come to him shall receive the bread of life. That they will no longer hunger nor thirst...

Which is so beautiful to remember on Thanksgiving, as this is a day that is centered around a table.

So, when you are breaking your bread, remember that Christ is the bread of life, and that you can always go to him in prayer and thanksgiving.

For Christ is always there to provide you with what you need.

Whether that be a spirit of rejoicing, or the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, or both all tied up in one, in a parade of love that lives on in the memories of your heart... Amen.