



Doubling Our Thanks

By Randy Roche, SJ

As an interesting variation on “counting our blessings,” we can call to mind how much we receive whenever we give thanks to others. We gain a particular blessing for ourselves by expressing gratitude and by acknowledging the gifts, graces and kindnesses that have been given to us. An exercise of this kind, reflecting on the interior and exterior consequences of giving thanks, can be both revelatory and consoling.

Most of us have been taught to say “thank you” for the favors, courtesies and thoughtfulness that people have provided for us, and we have likely developed habits of thanking people who were good to us. Giving thanks is an important positive aspect of our own personal development. But we have the capability of transcending our words and deeds of gratitude through the interior action of reflecting. We receive increased additional benefits for ourselves whenever we reflect on our experiences of giving thanks and whenever we become more aware of how we are affected by communicating our gratitude to others.

Our spiritual nature provides the basis for giving thanks as an appropriate action. That is one level. A deeper level of our spirituality is involved by consciously accepting the consolations that result when we reflect upon our experiences of giving thanks. Our attitude regarding the significance of gratitude grows and develops by choosing to make note of the effects upon us when we communicate our thanks to others. It is possible to say “thank you” almost entirely from habit, which is still quite positive. But when we pause for even the briefest of reflections to consciously advert to what we have done, our thanks are doubled.

God blesses us with very many gifts that come to us through others. Thanking God for all that we receive from our fellow humans does not at all detract from the thanks we give to them and our appreciation for their relationship with us. Rather, in acknowledging the source of all goodness, we become alert to the beautiful truth of how much God loves us. In a similar fashion we ourselves are grateful to little children for their small courtesies while at the same time being thankful that their parents and guides have set them such a good example.

Gifts are always interpersonal, involving the intention of the giver and the acceptance of the receiver, whether we exchange a carefully wrapped package or a brief smile. Most of us appreciate receiving insights and inspirations when we are writing, planning, problem-solving or otherwise involved in creative activities. We do not have to attribute these experiences to God’s care for us as individuals, but if we do so, our pleasure in the experience will be enhanced.

Likewise, the breezes and sunshine, all the observable aspects of the natural world and the universe can all be appreciated as carefully wrapped packages and loving smiles from God.

Doubling our thanks is a gracious opportunity that costs us nothing and requires only that we notice what takes place within us whenever we are grateful.

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Throughout his years of ministry, he has continuously deepened his own experience of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, while also acting as a guide in the Exercises for lay people and religious. Not surprisingly, his specialty is Ignatian spirituality as a tool for discernment in decision-making.