

## *Falling into place*

(With thanks to Ricky)

Thanksgiving Day, 2021

Church of the Ascension, Chicago

Fr. Patrick Raymond

*Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. - James 1:17*

**An explanatory note:** Woe to the Rector who fails to look over the printed bulletin! In preparing for this message, I referenced our bulletin from last year's Thanksgiving Day mass. It includes a gospel passage from Luke rather than the one in your bulletins this morning. I gather you'll be more edified by having the text on which I prepared rather than one on which I might wildly extemporize. So, with that:

*On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." - Luke 17:11-19*

Many people send me or give me many things that they want me to read. I gather this happens, in part, because I am a priest and preacher and rector. Sometimes the thing to be read is hand delivered or sent by mail; sometimes it's just a text message. Sometimes it's a book or a journal or a photocopy of an essay; sometimes it's just a quote.

Two days ago, for instance, I received a text message with an unattributed quote, one that could be edifying at any time but may be especially timely for Thanksgiving Day. The quote is this: "My anxious mind says, 'Once everything falls into place, I will be thankful and at peace.' But my wise heart says, 'Once I am thankful and at peace, everything will fall into place.'"

All of us here know that life is not all that simple. We can't navigate all hard decisions and losses and obstacles and attachments solely by way of one quote, however inspirational.

But there are some of us for whom Thanksgiving Day provides a valuable annual reminder about a heart of gratitude. We may be jostled today by seeing how easy it has been over the past year to lose our heart of gratitude. We may recognize this day that preserving and growing and benefitting from our gratitude requires our intentional devotion of time and attention.

*“My anxious mind says, ‘Once everything falls into place, I will be thankful and at peace.’ But my wise heart says, ‘Once I am thankful and at peace, everything will fall into place.’”*

For those of us who are Christian, gratitude or thankfulness is not merely a self-help technique. Gratitude flows from our faith in and our knowledge of and our relationship to a living and loving God, made known to us in Jesus. Thankfulness may and should partly arise from the many ways we may see the Body of Christ alive in the world: in faith, hope and love. But gratitude-in-faith tends to discount worldly appearances, attachments, aspirations and outcomes. Gratitude-in-faith largely begins with and is cultivated by a bigger and more transcendent vision of a divine reality we only partly grasp for now.

This heavenly reality is beautifully conveyed as a principle in the first verse of today’s epistle reading from James: *“Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”* Hearing this divine perspective on thankfulness prepares us to see it embodied in the one leper from the gospel story who, as the text says, *“...when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.”*

The author clearly wants to emphasize the observation of Jesus that only one in ten turned back to give thanks. *“Jesus asked, ‘Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?’”* I wonder how often you or I are among the other nine, failing to see the blessing, or so focused on some desired positive outcome that we missed the presence and love and blessing of God in it.

I started this message by mentioning the many things that people send my way wanting me to read them. I may be on the receiving end of more of this kind of expectation than many others. But all of you, all of us, are in fact bombarded by messages, many of which are laden with SHOULD, many of which promise happiness, many of which purport to give us a map to the ever-elusive promised land where everything will fall into place.

These messages can play into our anxious minds that say, *‘Once everything falls into place, we will be thankful and at peace.’* But today our wise and faithful hearts may remind us, *‘Once we are thankful and at peace – in God – everything will fall into place.’* Amen.