

# THANKSGIVING HOMILY 2008

Fr. Patrick Collins

## Introduction to the Readings

As we hear God's Word for Thanksgiving 2008 let me suggest some questions for each of us: How can we give Thanks in a year not of abundance but of scarcity? With so many problems with our economy and in our world today, is it realistic to think that we can honestly say "Thanks Be to God" on this Thanksgiving Feast?

Can we actually identify with the words of Sirach: "Bless the God of all who has done wondrous things on earth?" Can we find truth in Paul's assertion that we have been "enriched in every way?" Can we, like the cleansed leper, return thanks because we realize what God has done for us? I believe we can - but not easily. Hear God's Word and wonder.

## Homily

Did you hear the story about the woman who looked out of her kitchen window on Monday morning to notice her neighbor hanging out her laundry to dry? She noticed that the whites looked gray and the coloreds looked dull. "Such a shame that woman doesn't know how to wash her clothes clean," she said to husband. The same thing happened the next Monday. But the third Monday - oh my, what a change! The whites sparkled in the sunlight and the colored clothes were radiant. Finally, the woman thought to herself, that neighbor lady has discovered how laundry should be done. When she told her husband how much better the neighbor's laundry looked, he said, "Well, it should. Last Tuesday I washed your kitchen window."

So often the way we see things is conditioned by our own "dirty windows." What seems to be a problem "out there" is actually a problem "in here" - in us - in the way we perceive the situation.

On this Thanksgiving Day 2008 there appears to be so much "dirty laundry" out there in our economy --- in our world. And many are and will be suffering from the filth of untruth which has undergirded our economic ways. Everyone is calling for "a fix."

But what can effectively "fix" the flaws in our capitalistic economy? Are bailouts merely putting bandaids on a corpse? Is the answer really in a stimulus package to get you and me to spend more money? On what? For what? Is this really just a gargantuan task for the Treasury Secretary? Or does it call for a major economic conversion for each of us?

Perhaps what is really called for is a window washing of our own consciousness - a different way of seeing --- clearing the clutter of our own over-stuffed lifestyles. Only if we take a good clean look at the ways in which we honestly and credibly make money, spend money, save money and share money can we truly Give Thanks in this difficult year of increasing scarcity. I believe that we CAN say "thanks alot" if we hear this financial crisis as a wake-up call from our God - challenging us to reimagine our economy according to God's economic plan.

The huge economic bubble has burst upon us all across the globe. I suggest this is due to the fact that, with our craving for more and more "stuff" to own and manipulate, we have failed to hear and heed my Dad's homegrown wisdom: "Don't Get Too Big For Your Britches." Greed - living on credit beyond our means as persons, corporations and nations - that is what has done us in. The chickens have come home to roost. Our laundry looks pretty sad! For God does not long tolerate lived lies. The truth will always win in the end.

The United States Bishops recently addressed a letter to the current administration in Washington D.C. describing our diseased economy:

"The scandalous search for excessive economic rewards even to the point of dangerous speculation that exacerbates the pain and losses of the more vulnerable are egregious examples of an economic ethic that places economic gain above all other values. Sadly, greed, speculation, exploitation of vulnerable people and dishonest practices helped to bring about this serious situation." (September 26, 2008 Letter of Bishop William Murphy, chair of the USCCB committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development)

How can we on this Thanksgiving Day wash the filth from the windows our own economic perceptions? We MUST reevaluate our economic visions and practices from a spiritual perspective. We need to see our economy with the clear vision of God's eyes. And that vision allows us to see and to say: what is best for me, for us, is what is best for all.

In our economic trauma these days we are in a situation resembling that of the ten lepers in today's Gospel. How so, you say?

In Jesus time, lepers were not allowed to live a normal social life in the community. They were pushed outside the normal way of living in community because their disease was contagious. And so too is our own consumerism and materialism contagious. Shopping more is NOT the answer. We live in what some call an economic totalitarianism. Everything depends upon and is measured by money and things. We are afflicted with the sores of over-extended credit, gas-guzzling vehicles and too much "stuff" in our cupboards. More and more folks are slipping into a leprous situation - tossed out of their homes and losing the security of their savings.

Like the lepers who met Jesus and asked for mercy, we need to do the same in humility. Jesus simply told them to do what the law required for persons in that diseased condition: "Go, show yourselves to the priests." That ritual washing was required and their cleansing had to be certified by the sacred authorities before they could return to normal living with the rest of the community.

While we may not need to "show ourselves to the priests" to fulfill a rule of ritual purity, we do need today to place our diseased economy under a spiritual x-ray - a penetrating light which can cleanse the filth of our own selfishness and greed. Our economic woes are not just structural. They are also deeply spiritual. Why? Because private gain has prevailed over the common good. We've lost sight of what the common good is. We are driven by a self-interest and unregulated greed - primarily looking out for good old Number One. Now there is nothing wrong with self-interest and success as long as one does this in the context of what is good for all. Healthy self-interest will always be in the context of Other-Interest.

The priorities in our economy need to be revised - or perhaps better said, reversed. Whereas our normal way of seeing the economy give first place to profit - no matter how it is gained. But, if we wash the windows of our soul, our priorities would read like this: People, Planet and then Profit. Profit gained at the expense of persons and of the global village in which we live must be seen as "dirty laundry" - indeed, as immoral because it is dehumanizing. Money must be at the service of people and the planet - not the other way around.

Back to the story of the ten lepers: Only one leper came back to thank Jesus for the healing. For him more than his body had been healed. He realized that his very way of seeing and being in the world had been transformed by God's grace. The other nine healed lepers seem to have returned to business-as-usual. They didn't realize what had really happened to them. Their vision had not been transformed. They could not acknowledge the One who had worked that wondrous deed. Only the one Giving Thanks had the windows of his vision purified to see the source of his New Life and The Path Ahead. It is Thanksgiving that makes all the difference.

Our global economy must grow again but in ways that serve three P's: **People, Planet** and only then **Profit**. That will call for us to allow God to wash the windows of our perception. That can convert our old ways of selfishness and greed toward a vision of seeing all in the light of the common good. It will be a way of graciously respecting nature and supporting a sufficiency for all. That's in strong contrast to the model of the traditional economic powers which translates to efficiency for the few and deficiency for everyone else.

Economic growth according to God's pattern will call for a whole new way of relating to money. We must cure the leprous type of profit-first, profit-only economic growth that we have unleashed. And this new way of thinking, seeing and acting must come from the bottom up - from each one of us changing our visions, our values and our behaviors. We cannot spend our way out of this crisis. We must transform the ways in which money is made, saved, shared and spent. That's God's economic bailout!

If that can happen within our own consciousness and in our own consciences, then these unsettling times will have proved to have been not just scarcity but a Gift of God opening our eyes toward a more just and equitable abundance for all. Then, with Sirach on this 2008 Thanksgiving we can honestly say: ""Bless the God of all who has done wondrous things on earth Who fosters people's growth from their mother's womb, and fashions them according to his will." (Sirach 50)