

Several yrs ago, this letter appeared in Dear Abby's newspaper column: **Dear Abby, Happiness is having parents who don't get mad when you come home late.... Happiness is having your own bedroom... Happiness is getting the phone call you've been hoping for from that boy you like.Happiness is knowing that you're as well dressed as everybody else... Happiness is something I don't have.** – **Signed- 15-yrs old & unhappy.** ...A few days later, a young girl sent this response to that letter: **Dear Abby, Happiness is being able to talk... Happiness is being able to see... Happiness is being able to hear... Happiness is being able to walk... I can talk, I can see, I can hear, but I can't walk.** **Signed- 13-yrs old and very happy.**

Switching to another section of the newspaper, one of my favorite Peanuts cartoons shows Charlie Brown bringing Snoopy his dinner on Thanksgiving Day... But it was just his usual bowl of dog food. Snoopy takes one look at the dog food & says to himself, "This isn't fair. The rest of the world is eating turkey with all the trimmings, & all I get is dog food. Because I'm a dog, all I get is dog food."...He stays there staring at his bowl for a minute, & then he thinks, "I guess it could be worse.... I could be a turkey."

Ok, now what do the Dear Abby letters,...the Snoopy cartoon...& today's Gospel have in common? They all are about...what????...That's right, **GRATITUDE – THANKFULNESS**...for the good things God does for us & God gives to us....The Dear Abby letters contrast the ingratitude of one teenage girl with the gratitude of another who has much less to be thankful for...In the cartoon, Snoopy is initially ungrateful for the meal he has been served, until he realizes there are others a lot worse off than he is...And in the Gospel story, 10 lepers – 10 people with this horrible, disfiguring disease that made them outcasts from their community, even from their own families – came to Jesus desperately begging to be cured...and He cured them....all 10 of them,...But only one came back to thank Him...Jesus responds to the ingratitude of the other 9, saying: "Were not 10 of them healed? ...Where are the other 9?...Has only this foreigner come to give thanks to God?"

Now, we aren't told that Jesus was angry at the 9, or that he "uncured" them because they did not come back to say thank you,...but He was clearly disappointed...just as –I believe - He is when you or I fail to show our gratitude for the blessings God bestows on us every day...or when we are like that unhappy 15-yr old girl,...or like Snoopy, complaining that life is unfair, when we are much better off than a lot of folks. ...I don't think it's so much that Jesus needs to hear us say "Thank you." - I'd guess that most of us do say "Thank you God" or ..."Thank you Lord Jesus" several times a day...Right?...I think what Jesus wants more than our THANKS-GIVING, is our THANKS-LIVING...Being thankful is not only expressed in our words or prayers, ...but in how we live our thanks...in our **Thanks-living**....What is **Thanks-living**?

For me, Thanks-living is living in a way that doesn't take for granted the gifts & blessings God has given me – as if I've done something to deserve them.... **Thanks-living** is realizing that everything I have, everything I can do,...my talents & abilities,...my energy, my health...every favorable circumstance, every opportunity I've been given to do what I do,...any success, any achievement I've made...the love & encouragement of family & friends....ALL these come from God! ...NOT FROM ME!....And for this, God deserves not only that I **give** Him thanks, but that I **live my** thanks. ...**Thanks-living** is showing my gratitude to God by using these gifts & blessings not just for my benefit, but for the benefit of others so that through me they will know God's love & care for them...**Thanks-living** is being aware of the good that God is doing even when things are going bad in my life...It's holding on & trusting that God will give me the strength to make it thru when I'm knocked around by life's trials & troubles...even if they don't turn out the way I want them to....When it comes to **Thanks-Living**, I admit I can do a lot better...In fact, I

found this **Thanks-Living** quiz that showed me that I have a lot of room for improvement. Now, let's see how you guys do on this quiz...Please be truthful with your answers.

Question 1.: You are in the express checkout line at Wegman's with your 2 cans of green beans & one can of cream of mushroom soup,...& the guy ahead of you has 15 items in his cart & a checkbook in his back pocket. How do you respond? **(A)** With gratitude for the delicious green bean casserole your family is going to enjoy; **(B)** You clench your teeth & wonder if the guy ahead of you can't read or can't count; **(C)** You yell out to the cashier: "Express line violation! Express line violation!"

Question 2: You receive a letter from the IRS calling you in to have your tax return audited. How do you respond? **(A)** With gratitude that you live in the USA, land of the free & home of the brave; **(B)** You clench your teeth, grab the phone & call your tax accountant; **(C)** You write an angry letter to the newspaper about the terrible tax oppression in the US.

Question 3.: You're watching the Bills game on Sunday, & they hang on to beat the Patriots by three points... How do you respond? **(A)** You jump up & down, cheering the coach & players for holding on for the win; **(B)** You start worrying about next week's game against the Broncos; **(C)** You call the sports talk radio station & rip the coach for almost blowing the game.

Ok, now if you had all B's for your answers, you need to take a breath, chill out & relax...If you had all C's for your answers,...you may need therapy...And if you had all A's,...you are a big fat liar,...& you need to go to confession...Reality is, most of us – when it comes 2 thanks-living - are mixtures of A's, B's, & C's.

My friends, **thanks-living** is living with a spirit of thankfulness & appreciation for every one of the many gifts our God has given us,...and above all, the greatest gift - the gift of life...During the month of October – which is Respect Life Month – we are especially mindful of the sad truth that this precious God-given gift of life is being threatened on so many fronts....& we are challenged to look at how we protect, defend & care for every life: the life in the womb - the life of one who is dying - the life living in poverty - the life scrounging thru the garbage - the life behind bars – the life on death row - the life of the illegal immigrant - the life of one we love - the life of our enemy...Every life is a miracle created in God's own image, ... & every life has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ...And even if that life has been twisted and corrupted by the world or by the forces of evil,... it still belongs to God...& God has entrusted all life –every life - to our care and protection...

My friends, we are Christians. We believe in Jesus Christ who rolled away the stone on Easter morning, over-turned the entire Kingdom of death...& established a new Kingdom - a Kingdom of Life...& made us a People of Life...People of Christ are a People of Life...The best way we can show our gratitude to God for all He has given us – especially the gift of life – is to stand with Christ, stand FOR life, & against whatever destroys life... by committing ourselves to work for & pray for a world in which every life is sacred...every life is valued...every life is safe...A little later, we will hear from our Respect Life Committee on some of the ways we are doing this & what the plans are for doing more.

In conclusion (All right I hear some of you cheering under your breath)...In conclusion, I think most of us **know** how blessed we are,...& we also know we can do better at our thanksgiving & our thanks-living...And we can start right here – right now - during this Eucharistic Celebration. ...“Eucharist” means “thanksgiving”...We've come to give thanks & praise to God for all of He has given us & all He does for us. ...We are here to thank God for loving us,... & that's good. ...I'm sure Jesus is pleased that we are here, ... But there are many out there who are not here...He's gotta be asking – as He did in our Gospel – “Where are the others? Why haven't they come to give thanks to God?”...I don't know why they're not here....All I know is that for

some reason, God loves me...God has blessed me ...God has lifted me...and I am here to praise God and thank God the best way I can,...and I hope you feel the same way...As for those who are not here, ...maybe if each of us did a better job of **thanks-living**,... maybe if we were better at letting our gratitude for God's blessings show thru in our attitudes & in our actions., then maybe they would see something in us that would make them want to come here to see what it is that makes us that way...Then, maybe, just maybe, the empty seats in here will start being filled...So, in a few moments, as we come forward to receive our Lord Jesus Christ,...let's promise Him we will do better at **Thanks-Living...OK?...Are you with me?** ...If you're with me, say "AMEN!" ...The God who loves us & blesses us so generously deserves nothing less.