

## GLIMPSE

### Take and Give

Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J.

When I was a young Jesuit, we would end our morning Mass at seven, followed by fifteen minutes of thanksgiving on our knees. Our chapel was just down the hall from the kitchen where breakfast was being prepared. It was difficult to know exactly about which we were giving thanks, because the aromas were inviting us to be grateful for what was coming next. The smells made it difficult to remain grateful for the Eucharist during fifteen minutes of olfactory interruptions. Bacon and cinnamon rolls are a terrible distraction.

I have just returned from my giving a talk in San Francisco and while there I visited some long-time friends from college. I thanked them upon leaving and sent them a note of gratitude as well. The feeling of thanks stayed with me almost all the way home. It was interrupted by a delayed flight for which I was not thankful. Feelings flow like the tides and like the tides I am not totally responsible for their movements. Like the tides too, we cannot hold back the flood from ebbing, from slowly receding.

A wonderful teacher, years ago, taught me typing and I never thanked her, because it was before school started and the others were out there playing. She had great hopes for me, which I did not share at that time. I do have feelings of regret now that I was so youthfully ungrateful for her being so good to me. Instead of being dominated by those feelings, I am typing right now with gratitude that I can. I thank her by sharing the gift she gave me and most often without any feelings or remembrances of her. Doing is more than feeling.

Though the feelings may evaporate in time the reality of receiving is not measured by the amount or length of a thankful emotion, but by the motion of that which is received to be shared. The distribution of any gifts, how we give them, how we live them, renders the feelings secondary. We are not always aware of ourselves as individual gifts, and at times even can deny that truth. We cannot give what we do not accept or appreciate. These are the roots of gratitude and we have to start

there. I will know, rather than feel, myself as a gift to the degree that I give that gift away as much as possible. The Latin language has it right, "gratia" is a single noun meaning "gift". "Gratias" is the plural and means "thanks". A gift is multiplied into gratitude when the reception is celebrated as thanks by the sharing.

It has been said that beatitude is the attitude of gratitude. I ponder that it is better to receive than to give, but only when the reception is the preparation for handing on. In my earlier years I think I took in those cinnamon rolls gratifyingly rather than gratefully. I was not receiving them in preparation for my interactions with my Jesuit brothers in community. I occasionally drop back into the taking in rather than the giving out, but I am making progress and not eating as many cinnamon tasties. It is only a glimpse, so enjoy the take-and-give.