

GLIMPSE

Thanksgiving

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The first five years of my Jesuit life we celebrated the Eucharist very early in the morning in a chapel just down the corridor from the refectory and its adjoining kitchen. Mass lasted thirty minutes and the next fifteen were spent, mostly, for the smells violating our sacred-silence. Imagine that, smells breaking silence, but it happened especially on Sundays when we celebrated cinnamon pecan rolls. They shouted down the hall to us to get in here before they're all gone, eaten by the selfish "others". This experience moved me often to wonder just how long and how intense thanksgiving had to be.

Walking through the collection of art works lined up in the Vatican halls is a tremendous experience. So many different forms of beauty from various cultures and historical times. It goes on and on and so did I waiting to get into the Sistine Chapel. How long and how much beauty can one take in before your back and feet are breaking the sacred silence again. How long can we be grateful for beauty or any deep human experience?

Gratitude is such a combination of feeling and then something else. I have spoken with two Jewish women who survived Auschwitz. I can imagine only how excited they were to see the American forces advance into the camp and how thankful to God for their freedom, even though they were still so sick and hungry. I did ask them how long did that emotion last. They both laughed. "Not very long," they said, "Until we realized that there were many other pains and sorrows to face." Upon further reflection they told me that living through the sadness and loss is gratitude. Living is more than a feeling, or a beautiful realization. One of them picked up a piece of Shabbat bread and she said laughingly that eating is being grateful and she did just that.

I will be thankful when I am finished writing this, because it is almost lunch time, though there are no accompanying waves of silence-breaking aromas, because I am making my own lunch, but I am grateful, or am I just hungry.

Thanksgiving is how we live the Eucharist and all the other relational experiences of our lives. Spouses live their commitments not only when there is that special feeling of love and gratitude. We get shouted at by our ungrateful expectations that things should be different and according to what would make me thankful. Our sacred silence is living with the open hands with which we receive the Sacred Silence of the Eucharist. It is not "thanksgiving" in which we judge those things and events and persons who gratify our expectations. It is how we live beyond breakfast, beyond the cinnamon pecan rolls, beyond the paints, tapestries and experiences of being freed and loved. Receptivity is the beginning of our being grateful. Living generously with what we have received is thanksgiving. It is just a glimpse, and now for lunch.