

Homily for 15th Sunday b cycle July 11, 2021

Decades ago, the legendary Jewish-American songwriter penned one of his most popular songs, "Count your Blessings". It was featured in the motion picture, "White Christmas", a holiday classic. In 1954 the character played by Bing Crosby, Bob Wallace, sings words of gratitude:

*"When I am worried and cannot sleep
I count my blessings instead of sheep
and fall asleep counting my blessings*

*When my bankroll is getting small
I think of when I had nothing at all*

And I fall asleep counting my blessings.

Saint Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, counted his blessings and called upon the early Christian community at Ephesus to do the same.

Do we count our blessings? Are we conscious of the God who blesses us? Are we grateful for the many gifts we have received in life?

One of St. Paul's overriding themes in his letter to the Ephesians is God is to be blessed because he has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3). The favors of God are not material in nature, such as wealth, land, or power, but of a more spiritual character: wisdom and insight, the grace of adoption, the seal of the Holy Spirit, and sanctity.

Paul enumerates the gifts in today's reading, an early Christian hymn written by Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome. In particular, this hymn tells us of God's election. We have been chosen before the foundation of the world, from eternity, even before our conception in our mother's womb. His choice is a sign of his love for us. Paul writes, "In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will, so that we might exist for the praise of his glory, we who first hoped in Christ (Eph.1:11)"

When I was a boy, it was not uncommon for the boys of my neighborhood to gather together for a baseball game. At the outset, we needed to "choose sides". The first players chosen were the gifted athletes who were good players on the baseball diamond. The last players chosen were an afterthought. To this day, I recall someone saying, "You're stuck with Yanas". Ouch! To be honest, I lacked the necessary skills to be a good player. It is as if I was not suited for the game.

Being bypassed is one of life's most searing disappointments. Consider one who is passed over for a promotion? Or one who does not reciprocate our affections?

But we enjoy God's favor. In Christ, we have been blessed. We are special. A loving God has brought us into existence so that we may be God's loving possession.

What is the purpose of God's choice? Simply put, that Christians be "holy and blameless". They are called to a very high standard of behavior. Regrettably, the tendency in our day is to play down the difference between the Church and the world. Unbelieving persons must see in us the person of Christ.

Paul emphasizes the mysterious nature of the Divine plan. "He has made known to us the mystery of his will (Eph. 1:9)". God has revealed his secrets to us.

Today, mystery is often the subject of mockery. But Albert Einstein, arguably one of the great minds of the last century, one said that someone without a sense of mystery might as well be dead.

Let us "count our blessings" and not lament our misfortunes in life. In Christ, we have an abundance of blessings. Indeed, we have "every spiritual blessing in the heavens".(Eph. 1:3).