

***May God be praised.*** (Psa 148)

\* Dear Friends, as we gather around the table tomorrow we remember the blessing of the year and how much we were given by God. To the same extent, we gather today, on the Eve of the Day of National Thanksgiving. Here, having been reminded in a matter of importance, we confess God as the giver of all goodness; here we thank God for the privilege to worship Him as His beloved worshipers! Indeed the Almighty doesn't need anything in return, not even our "thank-you-card," (Act 17:24-25); but frankly our "thank-you-card" is only one thing we can offer as our response, if there would be a mailbox in the house of God.

\* As I know many theologians persist upon a statement that all what we possess or achieve, including a good attitude come to us from God!!! With Martin Luther we also recognized that the nature of the Heavenly Father is love that reveals itself in giving, and giving more abundantly than anyone can understand, (Eph 3:20), even in the giving his Son to die for us. Imagine, our Lord as an eternal, unfailing fountain - the more it pours forth, the more it continues to give. God desires that His children ask Him for much, even the greater things, and receiving them, render thanks for them! But we should beware of giving God thanks in a such an unacceptable manner as Cain's thanks, rather we should imitate Able's thanks that was received by God willingly and cordially, (Gen 4:3-5). Now here is the point! What should we do so that our thanks can please God and be accepted, as was Abel's?

\* Since we are gathered today exactly with the purpose to express our gratitude to our Benefactor, let us address Him with this question in our prayer. Therefore, we pray, Dear Heavenly Father, we ask you to enlighten our minds for understanding how to make our thanks pleasing to you, O Source of all goodness and life in Christ Jesus. Amen.

\* Thank the Lord for He has given us according to our prayer. We know by nature that the best way to express the gratitude to someone for his kindness is to give something valuable in return. This means that our words of thanks should come with giving something valuable as well. For example, when Noah came out of the ark, first he built an altar upon which he sacrificed animals to God. This pleased God not because he was hungry, but because Noah recognized himself as a sinner, and the necessity of a blood sacrifice as a divine provision, (Heb 10:7). Because the valuable sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, (Psa 51:17), they will not be despised. That is right, trustworthy, and deserving of full acceptance. May God's faithfulness be praised forever!

\* So, to speak on habits of giving thanks to God by Jewish people, for example, we've learned that His chosen people were accustomed to give God thanks in many ways. For instance, they did it through practicing different kinds of sacrifices including an offering of food; also, they practiced vows and other worships. By these acts of giving, the sons of Israel expressed their thankfulness to God. The next matter of great importance is that these acts of giving thanks pleased God **only** if they were given in the right spirit, (Psa 4:5)!!! The emphasis was laid on obedience, without which thanksgiving is worthless and detestable to God. Through the later prophets, God corrected Israel in their understanding what was acceptable in giving thanks and what was not. In (Psa 50:12-14) as it says, instead of pouring the blood of goats, the children of Israel should first offer their hearts. The devotional Jews understood this message as the complete reliance upon God's promises, trusting and worshiping Him only. Therefore, giving the right things and giving them in the right spirit were an important part of thanksgiving. Friends, if this is not true, then ask yourselves, why didn't God accept Cain's thanksgiving? May God's righteousness be praised forever!

\* Now what is proper for Jewish people in terms of thanksgiving regulations is also proper for Christians. But, first, consider the time we are living in now and the country of which we are citizens, then also consider the quantities as God's blessings. For this land and its fruits, we thank God in our prayers. I've heard from the people who travel a lot that in all their travels they have never beheld a country so abundantly blessed as the United States of America. It is certainly true. The next great blessing is the freedom that we have and for which our pilgrim fathers came to these shores and for which men and women through the years have sacrificed to preserve. As a former Russian citizen, I tell you that for me there is nothing more appreciated than the freedoms of civil and religious rights - as I know Russia has never practiced such things for its countrymen. However, in the US Christians still have rights to worship God according to their beliefs. There is no one who can forbid us, or to tell us what we should believe or how we must worship. This land is literally dotted with churches and institutions where young and older folks may learn to know their Lord and Savior. May God's kindness be praised forever!

\* As was mentioned before thanksgiving should spring from a grateful heart. This concept can be seen from (2 Tim. 1:3), where the apostle says, *I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience **the way my forefathers did**, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day.* But most of all Christians thank God, our Father for His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul

teaches us to be grateful to the Father for His Son. Because of this, we are *singing and making melody with our heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;* (Eph 5:20; Col 3:17; 1Thess5:18). Christians have much, much more reason for thank God in contrast to all people of faith communities in the world by virtue of God's work of salvation and sanctification in us through Jesus Christ, (Rom 7:25; Col 1:3-5; 1Thess 1:2-7; 2:13). There is nothing more valuable for us than forgiveness of our sins, the Means of Grace, and opportunities that we enjoy for our spiritual growth and well-being as we gather here in St. Luke's. In addition, we ought to thank God in anticipation of His answering our prayers, (Phil 4:6), knowing that His answers will always be in accord with His perfect will for our lives, (Rom 8:28-29). For these and other countless blessings, May God's love be praised forever!

\* After many Feasts that will come and pass by, finally, we will celebrate the Greatest Thanksgiving of all ages. At that happiest day, our mortal bodies will be restored into beautiful living bodies. After all, we will lift up our empty hands with the shout of thanksgiving and adoration that come out from thankful hearts worshiping Jesus Christ in truth and the Spirit. Indeed, even today all creation gives God thanks that I am a witness. Once I saw a tiny bird in the garden, sitting in the oak tree it cheerfully sang a song of adoration. The bird's song was very similar as to the followings: *Thank you, Thank you; Halleluiah! Halleluiah!* So let's us all in one accord with that tiny bird, rejoice in the gift of life and our many other gifts and blessings we enjoy as the sons and daughters of the ever living God, rendering Him our thank-offerings in the way we have learned today. May God in Christ Jesus be praised among us forever and ever though all eternity! And all the congregation says, *Bless we the Lord.* Amen.