

... *whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* 2 Corinthians 9:6

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I've been thinking a lot lately about fear.

And about how much fear we're seeing around us right now.

Not just fear of the virus but fear of the effects that all of the adjustments that we've had to cope with throughout the up and down cycles of social and public health restrictions over the past year and a half.

And fear of things that we can't even begin to imagine; fear of things that we can't yet see but assume are on the way – like the long-term mental health and social and economic consequences of the pandemic.

And that got me thinking more generally about fear; and about the many parts of our lives that we live fearfully?

Whether fear of inadequacy or failure.

Fear of criticism, or loneliness, or rejection.

Fear of trial or suffering or ill-health.

And about how the many decisions that we make are so often decisions made because of those fears?

How much of our lives do we live fearfully?

And how many of our decision that we make are decisions made because of those fears?

It seems to me that whenever we allow fear, any kind of fear, to shape our decisions and our choices we invariably choose poorly; we inevitably choose what calms those fears, if even for only a moment, but not necessarily what's best.

Now that may seem to you to be a very odd way to start a homily on our National Thanksgiving weekend, talking about our fears, but there is a point.

Because I think that gratitude is the first step to overcoming our fears – regardless of how great or small those fears may be.

Thinking about what we're thankful for helps us to put all the many different parts of our lives into a larger perspective.

Gratitude helps us to connect the many things that we encounter – both the good and the bad; both the joyful and the challenging, in a way that sees their inherent interrelatedness: in other words, to see the unexpected challenges that can come when we experience success; as well as the opportunities that come with our sorrows.

When we celebrate our National Thanksgiving, and when we take some time, as I hope that we'll all do this weekend, to think about those things for which we are most grateful, hopefully we'll not be expressing our thanks only for the most obvious kinds of things: the things that bring beauty and abundance and happiness to our lives.

Hopefully over this holiday weekend we'll also be thinking about those challenging moments that have helped us to grow as families and as people; those struggles that have helped us to become better people – better husbands or wives; better mothers or fathers; better friends and neighbours, better brothers and sisters to

each other; and maybe even those failures that have proven to be essential steps on a journey to success.

So if we're able to find a way to be thankful in all moments and at all times, imagine how much less we'll fear the unknown things that tomorrow may bring.

Imagine how much more confidently we'll be able to live our lives, making better choices, perhaps even taking some calculated risks, sowing seeds, as St. Paul writes metaphorically in this week's Epistle; [sowing seeds] that we've been too afraid to sow, all because gratitude helps us to see both good and bad, both success and failure, as part of the wonderfully mysterious way that God is working out His plan of salvation in our lives.

The greatest risk ever taken was the risk that God took for us; the risk of giving us His own deeply-loved Son, that through Him we might find hope and life and love.

Now on the most obvious level that risk proved to be an utter failure. That same Son was taunted and tortured and put to death.

But on another level, that failure was utterly overturned – a triumph beyond imagination.

If God is able to do all of that, for no reason other than his immeasurable love for you, then do we ever need to fear anything at all?

And do we need to make poor choices because we fear something worse yet still?

*Thanks be to God*

*Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*

It's been suggested that one of the problems with our society is that we work mainly on our feelings - on whether or not we 'feel' like doing something.

So, when we've lost a feeling for something we discard it, or we stop doing it.

So, for example, people stop acting in a loving way towards each other because they no longer feel in love.

But if we really want to be healthy and whole we need to be more than just the passive victims of our feelings; and our annual celebration of Harvest Thanksgiving shows us the way.

If I willfully choose every day to be reminded of all the reasons that I have to be thankful; if I willfully choose to think of those things for which I'm grateful, even in those times when I struggle to do so, I will inevitably be more thankful.

Gratitude can be more than just a feeling; it can be a trained response in every moment of life.

So, on this Thanksgiving weekend, a holiday weekend like no other in our lifetime, what is it that you're grateful for?

Bring that to Christ this day; and ask Him to help you to look at your life with new eyes; to look at life from God's perspective.

To look at every part of life with the eyes of gratitude.

In the process, you may discover that God has been better to you than you had realized.

And maybe, just maybe, life will be better without changing much at all.