

A Trinity of Thanks

My late husband, Bill, and I got married on Thanksgiving Day for a very particular reason. Ours had been a long and difficult road to that point and we were overjoyed to have made it. Over the next 23 years it proved to have been a journey well worth taking. On that beautiful autumn day, the sun shone and we were surrounded by friends and family to whom and for whom we were deeply grateful. All hearts were full. Each Thanksgiving thereafter we went around the dinner table three times, each time each person expressing gratitude for a particular blessing.

Now, I'm very purposefully drawing a distinction here between expressing gratitude and giving thanks. After all, the word is thanksGIVING, not thanksSAYING. It's too easy to toss off a "thank you" or "thanks" or, as my great-grandmother, Ma, would say, "ta". But to have any real meaning at all, in circumstances and for reasons deeper than "pass the salt", one has to have gone through the process of taking the moment to recognize a blessing when it's there, then actually feeling the gratitude in the swelling of the heart and, then, to truly be a thanksGIVING rather than a thanksSAYING, one would, in some way, pass on or pay forward that delight to someone else. And that can be as small as smiling at someone rather than just passing by

or as big as an actual act to cause THEM to feel gratitude. And, if they continue to pass forward *their* gratitude in thanksGIVING, God's will would be done as it is meant to be.

We don't need reminders to feel gratitude for the big blessings in life: the birth of a baby, recovery from ill health, a pay raise, the winning of a lottery. But sometimes smaller, everyday blessings that are equally valuable are glossed over. The rocks I brought today can be a reminder to truly FEEL gratitude for *all* our blessings. In externally feeling the rock, we might be inspired to fully feel gratitude *within* ourselves. Rub that rock for all its worth and focus on the things that too often we take for granted.

Small blessings that we experience every day – a smile, a laugh, the sun, a flower, a book - if we give way to a sense of entitlement, if we take these things for granted, we deny them their power to *be* a blessing to us and rob ourselves of precious delight. For some years now, I begin each morning by playing online games (Wordle and Connections) with two friends I've had since high school. All three of us are either widowed or divorced and it is a comfort – a delight – to send our game results along with comments about what's happening for each of us that day and to know that we are connected and invested in each other daily.

I have mentioned before my little dog, Martha. I take delight in the trust in her eyes when she looks at me. I take delight in the fact that she greets me ecstatically at the door when I arrive home whether I've been gone for five hours or five minutes. These supposedly small things stir my heart, not my head. It's a feeling, not a thought. And it's a quiet thing. No demonstration involved. No jumping or exclamations. Just sweet heart stirrings.

Some time ago, I heard an interview on CBC radio's "IDEAS" program that really spoke to *finding* the delights and *feeling* the delight as a practice. The author being interviewed was Ross Gay and he is the author of "The Book of Delights" which found such popularity that "The Book of More Delights" came next and in 2022 his collection of essays entitled "Inviting Joy" was published. The host of "Ideas", Nahla Ayed, calls him a "chronicler of delights". At first, I feared that he was going to be saccharine sweet, offputtingly positive and one-dimensional. Instead, he very thoughtfully and helpfully explained his approach to life. He doesn't shove it down your throat. He just says how it works for him. The task he gave and still gives himself is to cultivate a state of being *in* delight as a way of living.

Gay stresses that it is in common, not spectacular, things or occurrences or people that he finds delight. He delights in strangers

who pay attention to each other, a hand on the shoulder, in having pet names, in every day acts of kindness by random people as opposed to living in fear of each other. Hugs, handshakes and high-fives bring him delight. Gardening brings him joy when he considers the intricacy of God's creation in the interdependence and connection of the ground, the bugs, the birds, and the seeds. He takes pleasure in those little box libraries people put on their lawns, in pick-up sports games where the mood catches everyone up and they follow that spirit. He calls these the unquantifiable things that constitute our lives.

Gay says he's not being optimistic, he's just paying attention, not "looking at the bright side" but looking at everything. That doesn't deny the sad or negative aspects of life but it gives just weight to the positive. He says that anger or grief or any of what we think of as negative, definitely unpleasant, feelings are necessary to experience joy as contrast, that each make the other. I know that the more you have loved, the more you feel absence and the more grateful you are when the fog lifts to feel delight again. Getting to the place where you don't just *acknowledge* but *appreciate* the dark feelings is, I guess, a goal but getting the concept from head to heart is not a short or easy journey. Belief in a God who walks with us in love helps. And belief in a God who asks us to treat others as we would want to be treated is, in my mind, the connection to what Gay promotes as the delight of *sharing* a

delight. He says that a crucial part of the practice of delight is *in* the sharing. And I can see that because God has created us to be communal beings. Gay says that, “to be among the living – to be life – means to be in dependance always and forever, whether you like or not.” He refers to connections with people as “withness”. I love that term. Not just witnessing each other but walking “with” each other. Withness. In our bad times, he says to find a special kind of delight in who gathers us up when we’re falling apart. Then, to pay it forward in an act of thanksGIVING, you step up when it’s *your* turn to be in “withness”.

The fact that we gather at Thanksgiving with family and friends, whether there are few or many at the table, speaks to the God within us, the Holy Spirit, moving us to be in “withness”, to be in relationship. And to find, take, and give *delight* in relationship! A three-fold assignment, a trinity task.

Jesus is a blessing God bestowed on humanity to demonstrate how to relate to others, how to live out our earthly lives. As Christians, we have that Trinity - the template of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit - as a tool to understanding the unknowable. Bite-size ways of comprehending a massive whole. Each of us will have a different take or feeling about the Trinity. For me, I have, at times, felt – not conceived or thought but felt – the Holy Spirit move within me. At one point many years ago, I was

moved to rebelliously send a letter to all the Children's Aid Societies in Ontario which resulted in the I-believe-God-ordained adoption of our daughter, Mel.

The necessity to put impulse into action is well explained in this dialogue from the movie "Evan Almighty" when God, played by Morgan Freeman as Al Mighty, says:

"Let me ask you something. If someone prays for patience, you think God gives them patience? Or does He give them the opportunity to be patient?"

If they prayed for courage, does He give them courage or does he give them opportunities to be courageous?

If someone prayed for the family to be closer, do you think God zaps them with warm, fuzzy feelings? Or does He give them opportunities to love each other?"

The Holy Spirit moves us to take action when we are blessed with the opportunity.

Jesus' human journey speaks to me because He actually walked on this planet, actually dealt with human realities but with a spiritual eye and heart. He is relatable.

Grasping the concept of God is easiest for me when I remember what I read in my great-grandmother Ma's copy of "In Tune with the Infinite". It speaks to the reality that we are part of the infinite and eternal God source, that we are better to reach *within* for that of which we are born rather than placing an imagined distance between us.

The concept of Trinity gives us three ways to look at universal truth so three delights, three reasons to be grateful *and* three ways to give thanks:

- Jesus is the Teacher to whom we GIVE thanks by loving others and working for justice.

- The Holy Spirit is the Influencer to whom we give thanks by *following* our inner Director and, as they say in Twelve Step programs, "doing the do things". Paul writes in Romans 5: 5, "God's love had been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given us."

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- God is the Creator and Infinite Source of Love to whom we give thanks by following the direction of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as well as in heartfelt worship. The idea of "worship", though, sometimes troubles me. For me, worship rituals, including prayer, have a spiritual rightness *only* if they are truly born out of

gratitude for acknowledged blessings and delights – out of deep feeling. Similarly, when we're taking communion, we need to focus on what our actions truly mean. Worship becomes trite when it is for the sake of worship itself. To think that God wants, expects, or needs worship is to put human foibles onto God: ego, mastery, domination, expectation. We don't have to prove or fake anything. In actually following the direction of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, the amalgam - the total - the *whole* of God is delighted.

In John 15:11, Jesus is quoted as saying,

"I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

The Benedictine monk Columba Marmion said, "Joy is the echo of God's life in us."

I wish you all, not only delights, but the capacity and mindfulness to recognize them and to feel gratitude for them. As for expressing that gratitude, God already knows how you feel and has shown us, through Jesus, how to *act* on it and, through the Holy Spirit, where and when it is needed.

Amen.

