

Giving Thanks From an Overflowing Heart.....Michael J Tamura, 11/23/14

“In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity,” Abraham Lincoln delivered a presidential proclamation, “to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.” He reminded the nation that as another year of battle between the Northern and Southern States drew to its close, it nonetheless “has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies.” He goes on to point out the miracles that have blessed the country despite the violence, destruction and the enormous costs to human lives and livelihood of the war: Farms continued to produce more crops, mines more iron, coal and precious metals, and even the population enjoyed a steady increase. “No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things,” Lincoln declared.

“To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God.”

Yes, miracles will not fail to heal and open the heart to that loving power that unceasingly gives all to each and every one of us. Yet, it is precisely because of the grace and ease of the unconditional, never-ending givingness that we lose interest in and appreciation of its endless magnanimity. It's way too easy. And, we didn't really earn it. Besides, we opt not to answer the phone call that would notify us that we've won the mega-lottery, when our house is burning down.

Often we do not experience gratitude until what we believed we lacked is filled. We may confuse relief as happiness, the subduing of violence with the presence of peace. Absence does seem to make the heart grow fonder and we may only feel grateful when our longing heart, at long last, seems to swell with the jubilation of reunion.

Throughout history and across all cultures, leaders of communities have called for times of Thanksgiving. People would gather together to partake in services, ceremonies and rituals, and establish traditions meant to remind one another of a power greater than “any mortal hand” that ultimately gave and sustained all life. More often than not, such customs of giving thanks to gods, Mother Nature, the heavens or an absolute God, centered around

the abundance of crops at harvest time. Without food, mankind reasoned, it cannot live. And, that belief still provides what appears to be the bedrock of our Thanksgiving Holiday to this day. After all, it's Turkey Day, isn't it? Rub-a-dub-dub, thanks for the grub!

Yet, "man cannot live by bread alone." And, a heart divided, even more so than a nation torn asunder in a civil war, is filled with the emptiness of lack that knows only sadness and longing. How can such a heart be filled with joy and gratitude? What can fill our heart to the brim to overflowing? For that is the only way we are inspired to truly be thankful. Gratitude is an expression of abundance, an outpouring of joyous celebration of the heart from which all life flows.

We divide our heart when we perceive our world in pieces, where everything and everyone we see is separate, independently existing, isolated unto themselves, living not one life, but many separate lives. Yet, when we are willing to see life as it truly is - whole, undivided and eternal - we abandon the ramparts protecting our isolation, which we mistake for independence, and open ourselves to an entirely different world.

We may habitually fail to appreciate the priceless gifts offered us by the All-Giving, if we insist on placing worldly values on them. If it doesn't cost anything, it isn't worth anything. On the one hand, that tells us that we don't deserve what we didn't work for and earn. On the other hand, it makes us strive to become special in some way so that we would feel entitled to all that the world has to offer, more so than others who are not. We then wear the badge of entitlement whether it is wealth, fame or a ranking social position. Whether we feel undeserving or entitled, whatever we might secure in this world fails to fill our heart.

Yet, Eternity promises that if we but ask, we will receive. That's not given as a mere possibility for some people some of the time. It is guaranteed for everyone all the time. No blackout dates. No conditions. No limitations. Even so, we continue to demand, thinking that we can't get unless we become good enough, special, in some way to become entitled to the better things in life.

Too many of us forget that we didn't just begin in the middle of the story, as we do in every dream we ever dream. We need to awaken from that and remember that we were each created in the image of the Creator, who is limitless. In limitlessness, there are no exceptions or conditions for anything. Ask and receive. It is our gift and our inheritance. Are we grateful that all we need is, but to ask and everything is given us? It can't be that simple, we reason. Life is hard and then we die.

There is no such thing as death, an ending to life, in limitlessness. Yet, for most people, the worst thing that could happen in life is death - whether their own or that of a loved one. There are few, if any, greater agony of sorrow than for a parent to have a child die. If that is so, how can we imagine that that magnificence that created us, created us so that we would all die? Can the Creator be a sado-masochist? How can the limitless be limited in its creativity?

When a child dies, when anyone we hold dear to our heart dies, at first, we may be stricken with grief so great that we may feel that we are better off dead ourselves. Yet, what do these experiences show us if we were to drop our defenses and open fully to what life is offering us? Sooner or later, we begin to question what this seemingly inevitable fate that humanity has called death really is. What possible meaning or purpose could there be for such a cruel denouement for life? Are we to just shrug our shoulders, "C'est la vie!" and trudge on through the rest of our lives, resigned to the same end for ourselves and hope that it will come swiftly and painlessly, when it does come for us? *That* is how we stay asleep and continue dreaming our nightmare.

The other choice is to ask, "What's wrong with this picture?" Remember Buddha, the one known as "The Awakened One," asked that question about life. What was wrong with the picture that he was seeing of suffering and death everywhere he looked in the world around him. He questioned death and the seeming suffering that inevitably preceded it, when no one else did. And, he didn't stop seeking the truth and eventually, the truth revealed its magnificence to him: In truth, he found no suffering, no death, no sickness, no pain, but an eternal life of imperturbable peace, unending love and joyous freedom. Life was certainly not what it seems to most everyone else.

Upon his awakening from the nightmare of suffering and death, Buddha instructed us each to "Be a lamp unto yourselves." And, some five centuries later, Jesus reminded us, "It is written, man cannot live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." There is a brilliant light greater than ten thousand suns and a voice gentler and more loving than the song of a nightingale within each of us. If we are to discover what both the Buddha and the Christ realized, we must follow that inner light and inner voice as our guide. We will find that life is not what most people staunchly believe it to be. It is not for suffering and death. And, the world shows us that the world is not the reason we are here. In fact, the world demonstrates over and over that it is not what our life is for. Once we realize that, we begin to understand what Jesus meant when he asked, "What if a man gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

We are here to heal and restore the life within us that we've long believed that the world held at ransom. Now, we must realize that we are neither indebted to the world nor its hostage. Rather than falling prey to its dictates, we need to turn ever-inward and follow the guidance of that brilliant light of truth and the wise voice of all-giving love. When we do, we discover not an empty heart that offers only sadness and longing, but a heart overflowing with joyous celebration of being the beneficiary of Divine Grace. Then, like the hundreds of thousands of angels that ceaselessly sing their gratitude as they surround the Eternal Flame of God's Love, we will give thanks, without end, from an open and ecstatic heart.

May the radiance that shines within you continue to illuminate your every step through life,
May God's never-ending love guide you in your every choice,
May you always turn to the Eternal to open the door to your true self,
And gratitude fill your heart with joyous celebration of life.

Thank you for sharing your life with me. With love,

Michael

