

St. Paul's Counseling Ministry  
Key to Living, November 2007  
**The Healing Practice of Thanksgiving**

One key for living in healthier and more God-centered ways is cultivating "an attitude of gratitude". Below are three resources to support us in this practice.

**First**, a quote about research which links the practice of gratitude with psychological well-being.

*"Dr. Michael McCollough, of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, and Dr. Robert Emmons, of the University of California at Davis, say their initial scientific study indicates that gratitude plays a significant role in a person's sense of well-being.*

*The results of the study indicated that daily gratitude exercises resulted in higher reported levels of alertness, enthusiasm, determination, optimism and energy. Additionally, the gratitude group experienced less depression and stress, was more likely to help others, exercised more regularly and made more progress toward personal goals. According to the findings, people who feel grateful are also more likely to feel loved. McCollough and Emmons also noted that gratitude encouraged a positive cycle of reciprocal kindness among people since one act of gratitude encourages another."*

[http://www.acfnewsresource.org/religion/gratitude\\_theory.html](http://www.acfnewsresource.org/religion/gratitude_theory.html)

**Second**, a quote from Sr. Mary José Hobday, OSF, a Franciscan sister. This year many of us have come to a new awareness of how our human overconsumption of our Creator's gifts are contributing to dangerous climate change, as well as to the increasing misery of our sisters and brothers living in poverty. May Sr. Mary José's words inspire us to realize our connection with our Creator and all of Creation, and to take action for the health of the Earth.

*"Thanksgiving. It has different meanings for different people.... For me, the meaning of thanksgiving has been enriched by my Native American background, especially by the traditions of the Seneca Iroquois Tribe, which are extensive and thought provoking. This tribe has one celebration of giving thanks, for instance, that lasts four full days....*

*We fail to see, as we would if we were really observant, that the things we have - especially the important things - are indeed gifts that we have received from the earth, from each other, and, when all is said and done, from God. Or, if we are thankful to God, we don't really appreciate the fact that God has given us all the gifts we have, including life itself, through creation. I'm afraid we still think of the Creator as completely separate from creation, and, by doing that, we perpetuate the old dichotomies that have plagued us in the past....*

*The point here is not necessarily to duplicate this Native American ritual of thanksgiving - can you imagine yourself giving thanks for four solid days? - but to appreciate the profound sense of thanksgiving Native Americans have. Native peoples, I think, have avoided the dichotomy between the spiritual and the material. In this way, Native Americans can enrich the celebration of this greatest American feast - Thanksgiving - and our more important Christian celebration of thanks - the Eucharist." [http://www.gratefulness.org/readings/jh\\_fourdays.htm](http://www.gratefulness.org/readings/jh_fourdays.htm)*

**And, third,** a daily prayer practice: a simplified examen of consciousness.

- 1)...Close your eyes and breathe deeply, breathing in the love of God that surrounds you.
- 2) Reflect back over your day, asking yourself for what moment you are most grateful and for what moment you are least grateful...your consolation and desolation from the day....
- 3) Breathe in again the life you received in your moment of consolation and breathe God's love into your moment of desolation.
- 4) Give thanks for both moments and for what they have to teach you about what gives you life and what does not.
- 5) If you wish, share your moments with another person. (This is a great prayer practice to share with your spouse and/or children at bed-time.)

From ***Simple Ways to Pray for Healing***, pp 73-74; by Matt Linn, SJ, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Dennis Linn, <http://www.linnministries.org/books.htm>

God's peace,

Mary Ann