
I Thank My God Every Time I Remember You!

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Sunday of the Annual Meeting of the Cathedral Parish of St. Philip
The Second Sunday of Advent, Year C

*I thank my God every time I remember you,
constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you.*
(Philippians 1:3–4)

"I thank my God every time I remember you." It happens again that the annual meeting of the Cathedral Parish of St. Philip occurs on the Second Sunday of Advent, and these mighty words from Saint Paul, to the Philippians, are our text for the day.

"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you." It is generally thought that Paul wrote these loving and tender words while he was in physical strain, while he was in prison. And yet, even in prison, Saint Paul used the word "joy," or some version of "rejoice" some 27 times in this short letter. "Joy."

Today, I, too, speak of joy. And I speak of thanksgiving and prayer. I want to claim these words of Saint Paul, for myself and for all of us. I remember this past year as one of giving thanks whenever I remember each of you.

This is a season to give thanks. In the great mystery of spiritual life, I have learned a wonderful thing about thanks: giving thanks releases us. Giving thanks frees us! Let's go! And we so need to be released these days.

It's a pleasant coincidence that, in America, the Thanksgiving season almost always blends into Advent. That is fine with me. The tremendous fertility of Advent can be about giving thanks, and giving thanks can be like planting seeds. Giving thanks begins things! The seeds of gratitude can begin new birth! The gratitude of Advent lets us go, and lets us grow, into the holy new life of Christmas!

I thank my God every time I remember you. This past year, and every day, I have walked around this Cathedral campus giving thanks. Early in the morning, I see young preschoolers and their parents. I see older walkers. I see joggers and bicyclers and exercisers. I see those who gather for morning prayer. I give thanks for them.

I give thanks for the Cathedral Farmers Market, with about 68 vendors and around 5,000 customers and visitors every week. I give thanks for the red-shouldered hawks who live around us and above us. A few months ago, I escorted the Saint Monica's ECW Guild to the top of the Cathedral Bell Tower, and there was our red-shouldered hawk on the cross below us, watching for us.

I give thanks for the Cathedral Thrift House and the Cathedral Book Store. I give thanks for the Cathedral Preschool, and for the Cathedral Counseling Center. People! People who come to learn, people who come to serve. People who come to pray, who come to lament, who come to laugh and rejoice. I give thanks for the Cathedral Choir! People who come to sing! I give thanks for the gatherings of joyful wedding services. I give thanks for the gatherings of holy funeral services. I give thanks for our All Saints Dinner for the Homeless, and for our Homeless Requiem.

In the afternoon, I give thanks for L'Amistad, our afterschool tutorial program for members of the Hispanic community. I give thanks for Cathedral Towers, which is now a giant opportunity for service, for providing

housing to low-income seniors. but whose original physical footprint is now called "Parish Grove." I give thanks for Parish Grove!

I give thanks for you, for each of you whom I see walking in, to this church every week. Some of you are dancing, and some of you are trudging. Before most services, I try to stand right at the spot where the old dean's office used to be, in the carpeted hallway beside the stained glass window emblems of Philip the Deacon and of the University of the South. I watch for you, and I give thanks for every single one of you who enters and exits there. Thank you!

All year, I have been giving thanks for the vision, and now the construction, of the Good Faith Chapel. For each one of the construction workers. At the groundbreaking, about a week ago, I prayed for safety there, but my prayer was about three minutes too late. A child swinging a shovel had accidentally hit another child! (But they are okay!) I give thanks each one of you who is praying for chapel. And for your contributions! Of whatever sort and size. Every week now, I am signing individual letters of thanks for each of your pledges and contributions! Wow! Thank you! I send you a prayer with that signature.

Giving thanks is a blessed gift, and the Bible is full of it. Full of thanks. Someone told me once, "Gratitude is wealth; complaint is poverty." I understand that sometimes there are legitimate reasons to complain! But the time comes for gratitude, for giving thanks. The time comes for the wealth of gratitude.

In prayer and in joy, I remember each of you who has been committed this past year, committed and faithful to this complex Cathedral community, in all our diversity and hopes and laments. You have stayed with each other, loving and caring for each other as you were able. Thank you!

I give thanks for those of you who have taken the time to support not only me, but also the other clergy of the Cathedral; and I give thanks for you who have supported the many members and friends of the Cathedral.

I also remember those of you who have been mad. Maybe mad at me, or mad at the Episcopal Church, or mad at the government, or mad at the country. I give thanks for those of you who were mad at the people who were mad! And I give thanks for each of you. Today, I remember each of you, and thank God for you.

I am giving thanks for Incarnation here, the Incarnation of a different identity from the one the world wants to give us. As Christians at the Cathedral of St. Philip., we identify with something different from the categories that our world gives us. Oh yes, I acknowledge that we are male and female, republican and democrat, progressive and conservative, young and old, glad and mad. At one level, we are all those identities, to which the world chooses to categorize us.

But as Christians, we are, more deeply, something else. We come to church to identify with a different community from the one the world assigns us. Our identity is deeper than what national politics assigns us. I mentioned a month ago that some church pulpits are filled with the same news that we could get just as easily from one of our partisan news media sources. We could come to church just to hear our political identities confirmed and mirrored and amplified.

Here, however, I hope we hear every Sunday the characteristics of a different identity. We might hear of love one Sunday, justice another Sunday, compassion, tenderness, joy, peace, longsuffering. Saint Paul's fruits of the spirit. We might even hear of pain, honest pain, that God still touches. We hear about redemption and resurrection. Every Sunday, we hear from good preachers about Christian values. We believe in values here, the values that Saint Paul reminded us of, when he said, "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you."

Our Cathedral year is a classical pilgrimage of prayer and thanksgiving. Advent preparations. Christmas grandeur itself. Epiphany green. The Feast of the Presentation Sunday. Lent and Easter. Pentecost. Homecoming. St Francis Day and St Philip's Day, and All Saints Day. We are a classical Christian church with progressive vision. We are traditional and liberal. We are a medieval cathedral without the medieval theology. We are a House of Prayer for All People, gathering daily for thanksgiving.

The word "Eucharist," remember, actually means "Thanksgiving." When we gather, physically, for Eucharist, we are gathering for The Great Thanksgiving.

"I thank my God very time I remember you," said Saint Paul to the Philippians. He concluded by praying that their "love of God would overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight," so that they might produce a "harvest of righteousness." And we are praying for a harvest of righteousness, too. Remember my definition of righteousness; in the Bible, righteousness means "right relationship." Paul prays for a harvest of right

relationship!

I give thanks for that harvest of righteousness here at the Cathedral. I give thanks for our harvest of right relationship, when we are in right relationship with God, with each other, and with the whole world.

AMEN!

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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