



November 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last October, I visited Sacred Heart Retreat House in Sedalia, Colorado for my annual silent retreat. My spiritual director was Fr. Ed. Kinnerk S.J., a former president of Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Missouri. Fr. Ed shared with me some insights he learned from his time as a young priest while bringing Holy Communion to the sick and homebound. Often times his visits would include the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He discovered that during these visits, people inevitably shared their life stories with him. He listened to a wide range of stories and all of them included times of joy and sadness. Eventually, he discovered two trends began to emerge from these stories and these trends could be summed up in two words - gratitude and resentment.

Despite having difficult lives with significant suffering, some people exuded gratitude. Others oozed resentment even though they had many blessings in their lives. The difference between the two groups was the narrative they listened to within themselves. They ultimately became the story they identified with internally. Sadly, those who allowed themselves to be defined by resentment had a further complaint; their children and grandchildren never visited them. What an unfortunate way to live out the final years of one's life, filled with loneliness and resentment.

I believe Fr. Ed told me this story to move me toward a deeper sense of gratitude for all the blessings in my life, and to caution me against slipping into resentment. This is something that can happen to any of us quite easily, either through our family histories or through the society we live in today. The culture we live in today is not disposed to gratitude. Often life is fast and problem-oriented. We can sometimes see ourselves and others as a problem to be fixed rather than a mystery to be celebrated. Moreover, with the holiday season approaching, billions of dollars will be used to convince us that happiness comes from things we don't have. This can easily lead us into resentment, especially when we see others having what we are led to believe will bring happiness

and completeness into our lives. This is a very clever message that focuses people on what is absent from our lives, rather than what is present.

Gratitude is something we have to cultivate in our lives as it is a disposition that does not come naturally to us. It requires a conversion that is counter cultural in today's world; not an easy decision. However, our happiness and that of our families truly depends upon it as gratitude is the number one ingredient of happiness and draws us away from resentment. The latter can easily lead into worshipping false gods.

Gratitude is founded on the truth that all is a gift from God and especially from his son Jesus Christ. Without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ it is near impossible to develop true gratitude in our lives. Also, just as the practice of gratitude requires effort, so does a mature spirituality. The fine line between moving into the practice of gratitude and out of resentment is determined by how deeply we make participation in the Eucharist central to our lives. It is the heart of God sharing pure gratitude and wanting us to have a grateful heart so that we can journey through life with generosity and joy.

In closing, St. Ignatius warns us that ingratitude is the cause of much unhappiness in the world. Also, that the risen Lord chooses to reveal himself to us through each other. What a great opportunity parents have to practice gratitude in their lives, so that their children become filled with generosity and joy and that at the end of their life journey, they too will not be filled with loneliness and resentment.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Trout". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "With gratitude,".

Pastor