

Soul Space

SERIES: NEW YEAR, NEW YOU

Season colour: **GREEN**

In this series, **Gerard Moloney CSsR** offers tips for being a better Christian in 2018.



3 WAYS TO SAY THANKS

Scholars believe the oldest New Testament document in our possession is St Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. He wrote it about the year 50 AD, twenty years before Mark's gospel, which was the first gospel to be written. And it is striking that the very first sentiments expressed in this earliest letter are words of thanksgiving. "We thank God for you all," Paul writes, mentioning in particular their faith, love and hope.

It's a theme that runs throughout the letter. Paul tells the church in Thessalonica to thank God always. "Give thanks in all circumstances," he tells them. No matter what our circumstances in life, we have always something to give thanks for because of the blessings we have received in Christ. Thanking God is a fundamental attitude of Christians.

THREE LITTLE WORDS BEGINNING WITH A

As we embark on a new year, I suggest three ways in which we can give thanks, three words to help us remember to be thankful. Each begins with the letter A.

The first is **acknowledgement**. This reminds us of the importance of saying thanks. We need to say thanks, to verbally express thanks, when we need to. Very often we can forget to say thanks. I know I can. A prayer of petition is far more likely to come from my lips than a prayer of thanksgiving. It's the same in my dealings with others. I can criticise or give out far more often and readily than remembering to say a simple thank you for help given or a kindness done. Thankfulness is acknowledging what God and others do for us, and letting them know.

The second A is **appreciation**; having an attitude of gratitude. In our busyness, or complacency, when things

are going well, there is a danger that we take what we have for granted, not really appreciating all that God has done for us. I know that it was a lot like that in my case before I began to experience chronic pain. Only after being laid low, and experiencing the kindness and loving concern of so many people, did it occur to me how lucky I have been all my life in my family, friends, and Redemptorist brothers. How lucky I am that I can stay in bed or take a day off when my pain is bad, when so many others with chronic pain do not have that luxury. Thankfulness is appreciating all we have been given.

The third A is **action**. Show thanks by doing good. Show appreciation for our blessings by doing good. We see evidence of that in the response of missionaries and aid workers, who offer life and hope in broken places like Darfur and Syria. It is evident in the example of those who work for charities like the Simon Community and the St Vincent de Paul. It is evident in the response of all who seek somehow to bring Good News to a wounded world.

That's what having a sense of thankfulness does – it leads us beyond ourselves to others, to do good, to act for justice, to care for those in need. Conscious of what we have been given, we want to share our blessings, our gifts, our good fortune, with others. Thankfulness, quite simply, is love in action.

And this is what we do every time we celebrate Mass. Eucharist comes from the Greek word *Eucharistia*, which means to give thanks. So the Mass is literally a celebration of thanks. We acknowledge everything for which we must say thanks; we deepen our appreciation of all that God has done for us and given to us; which leads to concrete action. We go from church to world in love and service.

Acknowledgment; Appreciation; Action – three key ways to express our thanks to God for all God's blessings this year and every year. ■



Today's readings

1 Samuel 3:3-10, 19

1 Corinthians
6:13-15, 17-20

John 1: 35-42

John's version of the gathering of the first disciples is different from what we find in the other Gospels. John emphasises that they exercise free choice in deciding to go after Jesus. The first two disciples follow Jesus of their own free will, deserting John the Baptist after he had pointed Jesus out as 'the Lamb of God'. A lamb was regarded as a sacred animal in Israel: one was offered every morning and every evening daily as a sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple, and a special offering was made on behalf of every family at Passover. Jesus will die just at the same time as the Passover Lamb is sacrificed in the Temple and his crucified body will have some of the characteristics of the lamb – his bones are not broken but he sheds his blood, just as the lamb's blood protected the Israelites. One disciple is nameless: the other is Andrew, who then recruits his brother Simon whose name Jesus immediately changes to Peter.

GOD'S WORD TODAY



It's easy to forget the many blessings God has given us, especially when things are going well. We all have reasons to thank God, even in the difficult times. An attitude of gratitude is a good resolution to have for the new year.