

Sermon: 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Thanksgiving Sunday

Text: Romans 13:1-10 (vv. 9c, 10)

Theme: We thank God and serve our neighbour

Goal: We give thanks through words and deeds

Dear Friends,

Introduction: When we say “Thank you” in Portuguese, we say “Muito obrigado”. The literal translation is: “Much obliged”, from “obligation”. This means: When someone does a favour to me, or gives me something, and I say “Muito obrigado”: I feel myself highly obliged to do something in return. Usually we don’t do anything to reciprocate and just say the words “Muito obrigado”. But sometimes we “pay” the favour back, doing something nice for that person or giving him/her a gift too.

The practice is the same in our South African culture, but maybe the words in Portuguese help us to understand the celebration of “Thanks-giving”. We are not merely saying “Thanks”, but we are “giving” something back to God for all His blessings poured upon us.

The readings for this Sunday are not specific for Thanksgiving, but we can search them for some reasons to give thanks to God and to “pay” Him back something with our deeds of Thanksgiving.

I – We give thanks for the government

The text of Romans speaks specifically about the government. Can we give thanks for our government? We have so much to criticize and so many reasons to be unhappy with what is happening...

Shane sent me a nice text from the Newspaper (Cape Times, 12 August 2014). It is a report of Max du Pleez, a writer. He begins his article saying:

*“South Africa is a broken place. There is aggression and intolerance*

*about; the government is inept, corrupt; too many things don't work; our children's future is bleak... Is that more or less your view of our country today? Well, let me tell you of my experiences in the past weeks.*" And first he reports about a paper he presented at an Afrikaans Church, expecting lots of criticism; instead, people reacted positively and asked him: *"How faith communities could help to heal our society; how they could help to fight racism; what they could do to make the country a better place?"* – His second experience: He had to take his nine year old child to the Red Cross Children's Hospital here in Cape Town. He writes: *"I was apprehensive – it's a state hospital and I have been inundated with bad news about public hospitals. I was astonished! The specialist paediatric services are on a par with the world's best..."* And he goes on with his description of the good attendance he had at that public hospital and with other good experiences he had in other sections as well.

I wrote back to Shane: "There is hope. Not everything is lost..." I'm not doing propaganda for the government; and you know that we have a similar or even a worse political situation in Brazil. But just to think about: We have religious freedom, we can work, we have our rights, our children have schools, and we have food (and a lot of food)... It could be worse, like in Syria, Iraqi, Libya... Certainly we can say: Thank you, Lord, for our country! Help us to do what is our part in the society, and give wisdom to the people in charge ruling over us.

When Paul wrote this chapter 13 to the Romans, Nero was the Emperor. Some say that *"when Paul wrote these words in A.D. 56-57, the Roman government during Nero's first five years as emperor (A.D. 54 – 59) was rated by later historians as one of the best period of Roman rule"* (CSSB footnote v. 1). After this, Nero persecuted the Christians and even had Paul beheaded. But the main principle remains: "The

authorities that exist have been established by God". Without them, chaos is established. Good or bad, we need authorities for the basic order and laws of country. And we give thanks to the Lord for our authorities, remembering that they are our neighbours as well, whom we shall love, paying them what we owe them, according to the text of Romans 13.

II – We give thanks for our children

The Gospel of Matthew 18:1-10 shows Jesus' high regards for the children, for the little ones. And we give thanks to God for our children. We had a nice Bible Study on this text last Wednesday.

Jesus draws our attention to the high responsibility of parents and of all for our children. They have a special role in God's Kingdom and Jesus valued them a lot. An ordinary rabbi/master of that time would never talk to women or to children. Jesus did! He not only talked to them, but took the children in His arms and blessed them.

We must not hinder the children on their way to Jesus, putting obstacles on their way or causing them to sin. Jesus' judgment against those who cause a child go astray is severe and terrible. Jesus says: "Your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost." As parents, grandparents, godparents and church, we bring our children to the Holy Baptism and we teach them on the way of Jesus' love. We receive them as a precious gift from God and we give them back to God with thanksgiving, consecrating them to the Lord. May God be gracious to them all their life, preserving them in His grace and in the true faith in Jesus, as He stated in the Gospel: "...these little ones who believe in me..."

Our family is the closest neighbour we have to love, and not to harm. The Commandments, are fulfilled in love and must be practiced in our homes.

III – We give thanks for the forgiveness

But above all, we give thanks to God for the forgiveness He bestows on us daily and abundantly. The Psalm 32 presents this blessedness: “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.” Jesus talks about the love of the Father in looking for the lost sheep and about His happiness when he finds someone who had gone astray (Matthew 18:12-14). And immediately after this teaching, Jesus speaks about how we should forgive our brother and sister.

For the sake of Jesus’ death and resurrection, God is always ready to forgive us when we come repentant to Him. Without forgiveness, we are still in darkness and lost. With God’s forgiveness, we are His children and we walk in the light. His forgiveness is offered in His Word and in the Sacrament. When the pastor forgives your sins after the Confession, it is as Jesus is here forgiving you: “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven” (Matthew 18:18). And at the Lord’s Supper, Jesus Himself comes in the bread and the wine to give us His body and blood through the hands and words of the pastor, for an individual forgiveness of our sins. By faith, we receive and enjoy His blessing of forgiveness. And sometimes we sing after the Lord’s Supper: *“O Lord, we praise You, and adore You, in Thanksgiving bow before You”* (LSB 617,1); - and we forgive our neighbour as well, because “love does no harm to its neighbour”.

Conclusion: See, Thanksgiving has not to do just with food, crops and health. Everything we receive, have and experience fits in a Thanksgiving prayer. A Thanksgiving Service is a reminder of what we can thank every day of our lives. The list is infinite. Our eyes are lifted up with thanksgiving to the One who gives us everything, and our eyes are directed to our neighbour whom God put on our side to be helped and supported with blessings we share in love. Amen.