

Thanksgiving Perspective from a Cat

The great enemy of thanksgiving is pride. Unless we deal with our pride, Thanksgiving can become just a day for taking inventory of what we have accomplished during the year and congratulating ourselves. Sometimes we sound a bit like nursery rhyme Little Jack Horner at Thanksgiving, *"Little Jack Horner sat in a corner, eating his Christmas pie. He stuck in his thumb and pulled out a plum, and said, 'What a good fellow am I.'"* There are a lot of little Jack Horner's in the world today. A retired Brooklyn minister was returning to New York from Europe on an overnight flight. A large, ruddy-faced man sat down beside him, carrying a heavy briefcase. Hyperactive and frantically busy, he ignored the minister for a while. Finally, he turned to him and said, "My company got me on this flight at the last minute. I have to be in a big meeting in New York tomorrow.

You see, my company is Harper & Son. We supply most of the lights for most of the airport runways of the entire world." He glanced at minister to see that he was suitably impressed. Then he asked the minister, "What firm are you with?" The minister thought for a moment and replied, "I'm with God & Son." The man looked at him strangely and said, "God & Son?" "That's right," said the minister, "We supply all the light for all the stars in the entire universe." Perhaps all of us need to hear it if we are really going to praise God on Thanksgiving rather than take stock of our own achievements. Even if Time Magazine makes you the Man or Woman of the Year, it won't be worth the paper it's printed on if God does not approve. On the other hand, even if the whole world is calling you the Loser of the Year, it won't matter if God declares, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Friends, if everything we have is an act of grace from God that we did not earn or deserve, why do we brag as if we are the cause of our giftedness or power? We are not the source of what we possess. If we make that claim, then we ascribe arrogance to ourselves and diminish gifts God gives us. Our gratitude towards God delivers us from self-righteousness and pride! There was a family that had a large cat named "Gris Gato." Gris gato was huge, with long grey hair; he looked like he had a lot of Persian in him. He was clearly the head of the house. He would let you pet him, but it was clear that he felt he was doing you a favor. If you sat in his chair, he could fix you with such a look of utter disdain that you would just feel ashamed and change chairs. Gris Gato spent his first two years living in the woods, utterly wild. He would not let anybody get near him. One day the family noted that he was hurt, sort of dragging his hind quarters. Obviously, the cat had been caught by a dog or hit by a car. The only way they could get near the cat was to trap him, using food as the lure. It was a chore to get him to the vet, but they managed. A few days later the father called the vet and asked how the cat was doing. The vet said, "The cat has made rapid recovery. You can pick him up in a few days." "Well," asked the father, "How much is the bill?" The vet said, "\$575." "What?!" said the father, "No way can we pay that. That's not even our cat. You'll just have to send him on to the city pound." His 12-year-old son was listening to that conversation and as soon as Dad put down the phone, with eyes full of tears, said, "If one of us had to go to the hospital, and the doctor told you that the bill would be really high, would you tell the doctor to just get rid of us, just send us somewhere, because you wouldn't pay?" The father phoned the vet and told him he would come by and get the cat. They brought him home and named him Gris Gato. In the years that followed that cat was indulged and spoiled in an outrageous fashion. He has been ambushed by prosperity and is wonderfully spoiled. But instead of corrupting his character, he has thrived. That cat represents all of us, in a way. Gris Gato did not seek out the good life. He was ambushed by it. He ran from people as fast as he could. They had to trap him to get him to a vet. You and I did not first seek God. In our various sinful ways, we showed God that we wanted to do things our way rather than his way. But God never gave up on us. His love pursues us as long as we live and breathe. Gris Gato's family trapped him. God will not do that to us. He calls us. His love for us is emblazoned on a cross for the whole world to see. But God always leaves to us the right to receive Him, reject Him or ignore Him. If we receive Christ as Lord then God provides a kind of life we could never even imagine, an abundant life here on earth and eternal life hereafter. And it is all sheer grace, an expression of God's undeserved love. Do not use Thanksgiving as an occasion for self-congratulation, instead, let it be a time when we count our many blessings and name them one by one.