

Question: As a Christian, I say a prayer of thanks before meals; but I feel uncomfortable doing this in a public place like a restaurant. What would Jesus do?

Jesus never commanded that we say a prayer of thankfulness before our meals, but he did set an example for us. When he miraculously fed crowds of 5,000 and 4,000, Jesus first “gave thanks” for the food and then gave it to the disciples to serve the multitudes (Matthew 14:19-21 & 15:36-38). In the upper room on the night just before he was betrayed and crucified, he took bread and the fruit of the vine, gave thanks and then gave them to his disciples telling them to “do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). This kind of thankfulness was very natural for Jesus, and it should be just as natural for anyone who appreciates God’s abundant blessings in all of life.

However, Jesus also warned his followers: “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:5-6). In saying these things, Jesus was not as concerned about prayer in public as about the motivation for our prayers. To pray in public with the boastful purpose of being seen by others as a super-righteous person is hypocritical. The people who see you will not know the difference, but both you and God will know the motive.

On the other hand, we should never be ashamed of our confession of faith before the world, whether in words or by the life we live. Jesus said: “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

The Old Testament Daniel also provides a helpful example for us. A law was passed by the Medo-Persians that whoever prayed to any god except the king would be put to death. Daniel did not *defy* the law out in public, but he did continue to pray in his usual manner. He went to his room, opened the windows toward Jerusalem and prayed three times a day, as was his custom. He continued to do this knowing that he could be

seen when praying. Daniel was seen and reported to the king. Then, he was thrown into the lion's den; but God saved him from being killed by the lions. As a result, the king issued a decree proclaiming that the God of Daniel is the living God whose kingdom will not be destroyed (Daniel 6).

With the above in mind, each of us must decide for ourselves the question about when or when not to pray in public. There is no command from our Lord to pray before meals. In deciding what to do, you might ask yourself the following questions: Am I saying a prayer of thanks in order to be seen by others as do the hypocrites? Am I ashamed to pray when others may observe me as a Christian? Or, Am I faithfully following my regular custom whether in private or public? What you choose to do depends on what is in your heart. But whether one chooses to say a prayer of thankfulness in a public place or not to do so, we need to respect those who make a different choice. Neither should we pass judgment on one another's motives. Leave the judging of others to God who alone can see the heart.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: www.nchrist.org] 2012/07/27