

Giving (in) thanks

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*“As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation” 2 Timothy 4.6.*

I begin this column mindful of, and grateful for, two recent important moments in the life of our diocese.

First, your diocesan clergy have just returned from our annual clergy conference at Camp Capers, and prior to that conference Bishop Reed and I gathered many of the retired clergy of the diocese together for lunch and an afternoon of conversation.

Bishop Reed and I are tremendously blessed by the clergy fellowship of West Texas, and we could not be more grateful for the support and collegiality of these fine men and women. At the clergy conference at Camp Capers, Bishop Bill Frey served as our chaplain and led us in conversation and reflection on our theme, “Vocational Holiness.” His presentations were excellent, often times humorous, and spiritually inspirational. We enjoyed plenty of “retreat time” together as well — including reading, individual conversation, intercessory prayer, and even golf and skeet shooting. We also had Godly-inspired conversation about the state of the church and the Anglican Communion. In all of this, the fabric of our diocesan clergy family was strengthened by both the clergy conference and our day with the retired clergy. You need to know that your clergy continue to serve you and this diocese with amazing grace and a devotion to their calling that is second to none.

Secondly, over 350 persons gathered on October 27 in seven locations around the diocese for serious conversation about the core purpose and the core values that will shape and guide our ministry as a diocesan family. I am very thankful for the leadership of the Standing Committee and the Executive Board in facilitating these workshops. I am also very proud that we were able to turn out more than 350 people on a Saturday during football season! I am especially grateful to the diocesan staff who worked so diligently to format the day’s conversation and provide the materials in preparation for this work.

The Executive Board and the Standing Committee will meet together on November 15 to hear about these various workshops and will begin to identify the common themes as we move toward diocesan council in 2008, where you will hear more about our core purpose and core values as a diocesan family.

The theme for the 2008 Council is taken from Matthew 16.24, when Jesus tells his disciples that to be one of his followers means to “deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.”

As we move into November and December, many things come to mind — including “thanks” (Thanksgiving) and “giving” (Christmas). The two concepts (thanks/giving) work best when seen as a unit. When thanks is our motivation for giving, we are more

generous than when giving is simply seen as a duty. When we are giving in the spirit of Christ, we are reminded of our need to be thankful - full of thanks.

If we are going to be serious about denying ourselves, taking up crosses, and following Jesus, we are going to need a spiritually healthy understanding of both “thanks” and “giving.”

This brings me to the quote from Paul’s letter to Timothy that I listed at the beginning of this column. To pour oneself “out as a libation” requires great sacrifice and great faith. When we do this, we literally “give” of ourselves. This is sacrificial giving, the kind that finds its motivation through a heart overflowing with thanks.

As we move through these months of “thanks” and “giving,” I encourage you to pray about and reflect on ways that you might follow Jesus’ exhortation to deny yourself as well as Paul’s example by offering your life in the work of the gospel. When I think about these calls on our life and about our recent clergy conference and our core values workshop, I know the answer to the question posed by the Lord to Sarah: “Is anything too hard (wonderful) for the Lord?” (Genesis 18.14). The answer is: certainly not, if I am full of thanks and ready to give with the spirit of Jesus Christ.

This greeting brings warmest regards from the Reed and Lillibridge households to you and your household for a blessed Thanksgiving, a holy Advent, and a sacred Christmas. As we move toward the close of 2007 and anticipate an exciting 2008, I hope that you will be full of thanks, active in giving, ready to deny yourself – all the while knowing that nothing is too wonderful for the Lord.