

Thanksgiving for the Lord's Providence

Thanksgiving Day in Mitchellville, MD

Thursday, November 22nd, 2018

a family talk by M. Gladish

Lessons: Psalm 100 & Deuteronomy 30:11-20

Part 1: Thanks for Freedom

Good morning!!

It is great to see you all this morning, each one of you coming to the church for your own particular reasons: - some to be with your families, others to help with music, chancel or other duties, some because you want to learn, some because you really want to worship the Lord, and some just because it's what you do on Thanksgiving Day.

Some of you have come a long way, and some from right around the corner. Maybe some of you didn't really want to come at all – but you came anyway! Whatever your reason for being here, you all had to give up doing other things in order to come, and for that we can all thank *one other* because it really does make the whole experience more meaningful and pleasant....

But when it comes to being thankful to *the Lord* remember this: the very fact that you are ABLE to be here at all is one of the most precious gifts you have. It's the gift of freedom, and by this we don't just mean the ability to choose this or that, but the ability to DO it – even when you don't feel like it. As you know, you even have the freedom to do BAD things. Of course if you do there will be consequences, but still, you CAN DO bad things.

This precious gift of freedom is the most important thing the Lord has given us. In fact it's so important that He would rather let us choose, for example, to be selfish or ignorant rather than forcing us to be loving and wise. He would rather let us choose to be miserable in hell than to be happy in heaven if that's what WE WANT. And you know, you can be pretty miserable if you want to be – but you don't HAVE to be miserable; you can choose things that will make you happy.

I'll have more to say about this in a few minutes, but before we have our next song let's give some thought to this wonderful display of fruit and other offerings here on the chancel. Look at the variety! – All different shapes, sizes, colors, flavors – even the containers some of this stuff comes in are interesting, and certainly differ from one another. And why is there so much variety? Well, first, because YOU all chose different things to bring. But before that *thousands* of other people chose

to work on the farms and in the factories where these things were made. Think of it! Apple orchards, orange and pineapple groves, greenhouses, nurseries, can factories, box factories, basket factories, even art studios where people design labels for things, and print shops where they make them, not to mention trucking companies that bring it all to the stores and the oil and gas companies that provide fuel for those trucks – **and that's just the beginning:** the Lord gave ALL the people who made this possible the freedom to do THEIR chosen work so that YOU could bring these offerings here today.

So again, it all reminds us of the Lord's beautiful gift of freedom – the freedom to DO what we are inspired to do so that we can feel useful and good about ourselves as individuals, different from everybody else.

Lesson: The New Jerusalem & Its Heavenly Doctrine #141 & 143

Part 2: Thanks for the 5 Laws of Providence

Does the Lord want you to go to heaven? Yes! Of course He does; He has made every one of us for that purpose. But as Mr. Ferrell says, the Lord is very wise, and He knows that if He MADE us go to heaven we would not be happy. He knows that we need to be free to **choose** the heavenly life for ourselves – which also means that we have to be free to choose the opposite.

Now of course we all have to grow **into** that freedom. When we're young it's especially important for us to do what we're told until we really learn what the consequences of our choices might be. So parents and teachers give us rules to follow, and sometimes even force us to obey them.

But with grown-ups, although we also have rules, and many of the same rules – like the Ten Commandments – the Lord knows that ***He needs to stay out of sight*** and let us figure out ***what we actually want to do***. So in addition to the rules you all know He has ***5 special rules*** that we call the laws of His Divine Providence. And here they are for you to think and talk about this Thanksgiving.

The first law is one we've already talked about, namely, that we must be free to act according to what WE think is best. The Lord gives us this freedom to encourage us to THINK and to take responsibility and to know that we can make a difference in this world when we put our minds to it. If we only ever did what OTHER people think is best we'd never have any new ideas, or if we did we wouldn't appreciate those ideas nearly as much as when we think of them ourselves. This is

even true of the Lord's commandments: we have to be able to think about them and find out for ourselves that they are right, and then obey them because we see that they are right.

The second law is that we must stop doing bad things because the Lord teaches us to do so, whether we like it or not. That way the Lord can also work on us inwardly and help us change the way we feel. Please remember that in doing this we are still free; but if we don't stop doing bad things the Lord will not be able to help us change our attitudes, and we will never really be happy.

For example, you may not like somebody, but if you act nicely toward that person and get to know him or her, the Lord can help you get a better attitude and learn to appreciate that person.

The third law is that we can't be **forced** to believe and love the things of religion – or anything, really – but that we have to force OURSELVES to do so if we want to be happy. This is a big one because it sounds at first like it's taking away our freedom, but remember, we still have a choice. We can't BE forced, but we **can** force **ourselves** by making that choice. And we can only do that because we are free.

There are two more laws, but before we mention them let's see if we can all remember the first three:

1. We have to be free to think and act according to what makes sense to us;
2. We have to stop doing bad things so that the Lord can give us a better attitude;
3. We can't be forced to believe and love what the Lord teaches, but we should make ourselves learn to believe and love it.

Now, then, how can we obey that third law? How can we make ourselves believe and love something? The answer is in the 4th law.

The fourth law is that the Lord leads us and teaches us by means of the Word, and doctrine (wisdom) that comes from the Word, and by means of preaching from the Word. He doesn't just magically appear and tell us what to think, He says, "Read the Word, read the Writings, and go to church and listen to the ministers." Then make up your own mind. Take it seriously, but make up your own mind. That way you can feel good about it and really know that YOU made the decision to believe.

But, you may say, wouldn't it be better if He just showed up in person and TOLD us what to do? No. No it wouldn't, because then we would feel pressured, and not free. And then we wouldn't really love it, we would just kind of go along with it like servants doing what we have to do.

All this leads us to **the fifth and last law**, which is that the Lord works in secret so that we can never see or feel exactly how He is leading us at any certain time, but still, we need to know and remember that He is. That way we won't get too discouraged about bad things that happen to us and we won't get too proud and snooty about the good things that happen. But we will still be free to make up our own minds, and we will be able to stay peaceful and calm knowing that the Lord is always with us, always leading us toward some good, no matter what.

Conclusion

There are many other laws of the Lord's Divine Providence that can help us understand how He works with us, but these five are easy to remember and explain a lot. Every one of them is about making sure we are free: free to think what we want, free to want what we want, and free to do what we want ***and still be led by the Lord***. It's what makes life interesting and fun; it's what inspires us to take responsibility and even feel important, like *we matter, and we can make a difference*. And it's one short list of great reasons to be thankful to the Lord for all that is possible when we help and support one another.

Amen.