

Another Day

Biblical reflections for busy teachers



Give thanks

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body’. Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’” Matthew 26:26-28

There was an old hymn that I often heard my mother sing when I was young. The opening two lines went like this:

“Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.”

Looking back across the years, I suspect that her singing did not always come from a glad heart but, even in some hard times, she would still sometimes sing those words.

Henri Nouwen points out that we often divide our experiences of life into good things to remember with gratitude and painful things to merely accept, forget or even resent. However, he says, gratitude can be more than a spontaneous response to good things: it can be lived as a discipline. He writes,

“The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy.”*

Practising this discipline, we can *choose* to give thanks rather than to complain. When, in the upper room, Jesus took bread and the cup, he gave thanks and that was with a complete awareness of all that was symbolised by the bread and wine.

Can we who are his disciples put something of the same discipline into practice? Let's see our classroom in our mind's eye, let's go around it stopping by each seat, and let's give thanks to God for the young person who sits in that seat. Each and all of them? Yes, each and all of them and not least that young man who can be such a distraction at times and that girl who seems to bring out the worst in those who sit with her.

Lord, you who gave thanks in everything, help us to practise the discipline of gratitude to you for everything you give us and for everybody you bring into our lives. Amen.

* Robert A. Jones (ed.), *Beauty of the Beloved: A Henri J. M. Nouwen Anthology*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999), p. 147.