***So, What’s More Important - The Christmas Card or the ‘Thank You’ Card?***

Being brought up in the late 1940’s/ early 1950’s, I occasionally feel like “Ralphie” in “A Christmas Story.” Fortunately, I had no aunt who made pajamas for me, but even though we received not a large quantity of gifts ANY gift that came from someone not living in our house required a hand written “thank you” card. My mother would have the “Thank you” cards sitting out the day after Christmas and it was assumed that as soon as I wrote the card, she would write the address or if the gifts came from someone within a few miles distance, I would hand deliver them. It doesn’t sound like much, but I have come to believe that as wonderful as a Christmas card is - a “Thank you” card requires writing a message. If people take time out to think about us, and if they pray and ponder regarding the “perfect gift” there is a good chance that just knowing how much we appreciate the gift gives us a chance take on the proverbial “attitude of gratitude.” Consider how often in the Mass we use the word “thanksgiving” or “thanks.” Indeed, one of the most ancient words for the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar is “Thanksgiving” - “Eucharist.”

Over the years I have heard lay people tell me that they are often very sad that when they had given a gift to the priest and his family, that they never receive a card. Likewise, “Clergy Appreciation Month” comes and goes and few priests receive a card or token gift. This is not about assigning blame, and it also takes into account that we give out of love without any expectation, but consider an age when people were more gracious. Should the act of sending a “thank you” card simply fall into the “days gone by” when gentlemen held doors for ladies, stood when a lady entered the room, stood when the bishop entered the room, tipped their hats out of respect...the list goes on. It is not that the person being acknowledged needs it as much as each one of us needs to become more gracious and thankful for people whom God puts into our lives. The demonstration of affection and respect is dying, but aren’t Christians the ones who should both hold onto and share ways in which we should demonstrate appreciation to God for putting someone or something before us simply because He loves us. Maybe Christmas time is a good time to reclaim some social graces that have died or are dying. Maybe this is a good time to realize that we do not receive because we deserve it - we receive because we are loved.