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Thanksgiving Eve
November 26, 2025
Text: Ephesians 5:3 -5
Title: Instead Let There Be Thanksgiving (based on a sermon from CPR)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The text for today's sermon is Ephesians 5:3 – 5 which reads, “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this probably won't be what you'd consider a typical Thanksgiving sermon. What is a typical Thanksgiving sermon you might ask? Usually it's one that tells us that you and I, the baptized children of God, are supposed to be thankful to God for all of His gifts for us. First and foremost, of course, are His gifts of forgiveness for all of our sins, His gifts of life and salvation all centered in the Father's Provision, Jesus Christ, who suffered, died, and rose again to give these great things to us.

Second, we give thanks for the fruits of the earth: food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers...and the list goes on, as Luther draws it out in His explanation of the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Don't get me wrong. Giving thanks for salvation and for the daily things that He provides to sustain us is what a Christian does. It is what you and I do. But in our text, Paul plops down the word “thanksgiving” right in the middle of unholy statements and words and unclean actions like sexual immorality, impurity, crude joking, and so on. What's going on here?

This is true: Good works don't make you clean; only the good work by the Father in and through Jesus did and does that. Bad works, however, can undermine your faith in Jesus. Bad works can gnaw away, like termites on a wooden structure, and the whole-house falls. You can lose your faith in Jesus entirely! Paul says it in the last verse of tonight's text, "Everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

When Paul mentions to the members of the Ephesian churches such things as "sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness," he is specifically referencing their strong temptation to become entangled once again in their former life of paganism. This triad of sins is followed by another listing of three sins: filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking. Included here are not only immoral and filthy actions, but words out of the mouth. Bad deeds and bad words dirty your soul! They putrefy your flesh and heart! Beware! This is not you – that is, your baptismal status of holiness in Jesus – you are children of God!

The Ephesians were tempted to participate in the liturgies in downtown Ephesus that worshiped various idols, including the famous Artemis. Her temple – if you can imagine it – was larger than a standard football field! Now, that's attractive to the flesh! It's impressive to wandering eyes. One can imagine what went on inside, but we won't go there except to point out that the temple's main workers were prostitutes.

Each of us wrapped up in our own culture's seductive ways: coveting, adultery, pornography, crude jokes, abortion, living together before marriage, drunkenness, you name the seductive way. This is a culture of death, not unlike what was found in the culture of Ephesus. You're immersed in it, and you know it, and some of you even love it. Do you? We need to be aware! We need to repent!

This is what's surprising, though. Right in the middle of this list of filthy deeds and words comes this, "But instead let there be thanksgiving." Plopped right there in the middle of these words, of unholy words and deeds is this holy word and deed: Thanksgiving.

This word does not refer only to the act of thanksgiving. It certainly does that. But could it also be a subtle reference to the action of Thanksgiving itself, the Holy Eucharist, the Holy Thanksgiving? That's what that word, eucharist, really means. It's mainly used today as a fancier name for Holy Communion, but its original meaning going all the way back to the Greek of the New Testament is to "give thanks." That seems to be the main connection that Paul is making here in tonight's text because later in this same chapter of Ephesians Paul clearly refers to the worship service, where Christ is the one to whom songs and hymns and spiritual songs are said to be used to "give thanks always." Christ is the one who is plopped right there in the middle of the Divine Service, the one who sanctifies and makes holy with His divine blood shed for us on the cross, through preaching and the Holy Sacrament, the Eucharist. Jesus is here, now, plopped right into our midst, this assembly of sinners. He loves to be here among you, for sinners is his preferred circle of fellowship.

It's likely that Paul had presided at the Ephesians' altar for three years, serving as their first pastor as well as an apostle. He knew them. He preached to them. He probably spoke the same Word's of Institution that we will hear in just a few minutes. Jesus used Paul to give the Ephesians Jesus. And Pastor Paul knew their sinful tendencies all too well, and so did Jesus.

You can almost hear Paul saying to them, "My dear Ephesian Christians, there's the liturgy of death and there is the liturgy of life, the liturgy of this culture and the liturgy of heaven! Only Jesus can pull you out and keep you clean from your own filth, and from the filth of this earth! And He does it, right here in the Holy Eucharist!" Those would be the words of

Pastor Paul. He knew that Jesus works no partial purifying, He makes you completely holy, your soul and your body! There is nothing halfway with God when it comes to His work for you and in you. He leaves nothing undone.

Let's put it this way: Don't sully your tongues and your body parts with sexual sins and dirty jokes. That will kill you spiritually, and you will have "no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Be purified, be sanctified, by the holy blood of Jesus that touches your ears here through the preaching of Christ's cross for you and the blood of His that touches your tongues!

Right here and now, Jesus is using His pastor to give you Jesus. My dear American Christians, there is the liturgy of death and there is the liturgy of life, the liturgy of this culture and the liturgy of heaven! Only Jesus can pull you out and keep you clean from your own filth, and from the filth of this earth! And He does it, right here and right now in His Holy Eucharist! And for this, you see, we can and do give thanks! Jesus' purifying in the Word and the Eucharist is definitely a great reason to give thanks to Him who has given us His greatest gifts! Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.