

February Parish Nurse Corner

Awakening Gratitude

In this time when there are various restrictions in place, it is easy to become discouraged. One simple concept can get us through the most stressful of times; *Gratitude!* We learn to say, *thank you*, for the way things are, even though we may not like this experience. Before the pandemic, life was often busy day to day. Now there is more time to linger over a cup of coffee or tea, have time to think, and just breathe in the beauty of God's world. This has given us time to wake up to the power of gratitude.



We normally show gratitude when someone does something for us, but gratitude can help us turn problems into blessings, and the unexpected into gifts. Research shows that gratitude can:

- Help you make friend. One study found that thanking a new acquaintance makes them more likely to seek a more lasting relationship with you.
- Improve your physical health. People who exhibit gratitude report fewer aches and pains, a general feeling of health, more regular exercise, and more frequent checkups with their doctor than those who don't.
- Improve your psychological health. Grateful people enjoy higher wellbeing and happiness and suffer from reduced symptoms of depression.
- Enhance empathy and reduce aggression. Those who show their gratitude are less likely to seek revenge against others and more likely to behave with sensitivity and empathy.
- Improve your sleep. Practicing gratitude regularly can help you sleep longer and better.
- Enhance your self-esteem. People who are grateful have increased self-esteem, partly due to their ability to appreciate other peoples' accomplishments.
- Increase in mental strength. Grateful people have an advantage in overcoming trauma and to bounce back from highly stressful situations.

A few ways to increase gratitude

- **Develop a gratitude journal:** reflect on the past day, few days, or week, and remember 3-5 things you are especially grateful for.
- **Create a gratitude jar or box:** Decorate the box or jar and add paper and a pen or pencil for writing your gratitude notes. Every day write down 3 things you are grateful for and place the slips of paper in the container. If you are ever feeling down, take a few out and read them to remind yourself of what is good in your life. A version of this activity for children is included in the activity link below.
- **Create a gratitude box for someone else:** This is a thoughtful way to share your feelings with loved ones and cultivate your own sense of gratitude. Place heartfelt messages of gratitude to your loved one on paper, place in a box, wrap it and give it to your loved one. This is something several family members or friends can participate in. This could be expanded to letters written to your loved one.
- **Participate in a Gratitude Walk:** When you are going through a particularly rough time, try cleansing your mind with a gratitude walk. As you walk, observe the things you see around you. Take it all in. Be aware of nature, the colors of the trees, the sounds the birds make, and the smell of the plants. Notice how your feet feel when you step onto the ground.
- **Develop a gratitude inventory:** The worksheet below provides starting statements to complete as you write an inventory of what you are grateful for in your life. Finish this activity with a prayer. Examples are listed below.
<https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/why-im-grateful.pdf>

Gratitude Prayer:

Today Lord let me be grateful as I start the process of turning today's pain into tomorrow joy.

Prayer During Difficult Times:

God of love and mercy, assist me in this time of trouble and anxiety. Ease my burdens.

Strengthen my faith. Increase my trust and confidence in Your compassionate care.

Give me the courage I need, dear Lord, to face the difficulties before me, knowing that with Your help, miracles happen and lives are restored. I pray for a share in Your healing graces, and I ask Your comforting goodness, for health in mind, body, and for a heart filled with hope and Peace. – Amen

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Resources

<https://nscatholic.org/news/prayers-meditations>

<https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-exercises/>

<https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/gratitude-exercises.pdf>