

## **SUNDAY DEVOTIONAL, OCTOBER 09, 2022**

### **SCRIPTURE FOCUS: PSALM 100**

1 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

3 Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

### **PRAYER: "NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD"**

1 Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,  
who wondrous things has done, in whom his world rejoices;  
who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way  
with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

2 O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,  
with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us,  
to keep us in his grace, and guide us when perplexed,  
and free us from all ills of this world in the next.

3 All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,  
the Son and Spirit blest, who reign in highest heaven  
the one eternal God, whom heaven and earth adore;  
for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

### **BLESSED THOUGHTS: "GIVING THANKS IN HARD TIMES"**

I have always loved "thanksgiving," both the American holiday I grew up with, and—even more—the Canadian version. I'm not sure just how much of the back story behind the American Thanksgiving story is true, but there are a lot of great memories of family gatherings.

Aside from the good food (and my wife is a great cook!), there is the profound need to give thanks to God for life, for love, for freedom, for peace, and, yes, for our faith. But while everyone gets to enjoy a long weekend, let's not forget that for a lot of people, it's hard to be thankful when times are hard.

Hard times: that first big holiday when a loved one is no longer sitting at their usual spot at the table. Or when disability or disease knocks you for a loop. Or when your marriage goes on the rocks. Or when you can no longer pay the bills. Or when a friend gets into trouble, or ... well ... we all know what "hard times" are like.

Sad hearts may find it hard to be thankful. But that's why our gracious God inspired such a wonderful thanksgiving hymn as "Now thank we all our God." It really is "the National Anthem of Hard Times." It was written by one of the most amazing Lutheran pastors of all time, Martin Rinkart.

In 1617, at the age of 31, Rinkart became Archdeacon in his native town of Eilenburg, just as the Thirty Years' War broke out. The residents of this walled town endured many horrors during this time, and Rinkart stood by his flock while he himself endured the hardship of quartering soldiers in his home and frequent plunderings of his meager stock of grain and household goods. He was a faithful, caring pastor who attended to the needs of the sick and the hungry during extreme circumstances.

Eilenburg became an overcrowded refuge for those from the country districts where the Swedes had spread devastation and destruction. A steady stream of refugees poured into the city as the Swedish army surrounded it. In 1637 the plague claimed 8,000 people including the vast majority of the town council, an exorbitant number of children, clergymen from a neighboring parish, and Rinkart's wife.

Now he had to do the work of three men, and buried 40 to 50 people a day — a total of 4,480 — but through it all he remained well. Finally, it became necessary to bury the refugees in trenches without service.

After the plague, the town was hit by a famine so extreme that "30 or 40 people might be seen fighting in the streets for a dead cat or crow." Rinkart did his best to help and gave away everything, keeping only the barest rations for his own family. In time, he was forced to mortgage his future income to buy bread and clothes for his children.

As if that suffering were not enough, the Swedes returned and imposed a ransom of 30,000 thalers on the town. Rinkart left the safety of the city to meet with the Swedish general to plead for mercy. He was refused and returned to the town saying, "Come my children, we can find no hearing, no mercy with men, let us take refuge with God." He fell to his knees, praying with such earnestness that the Swedish general relented and lowered his demand to 2,000 florins.

Through grief, and loss, suffering and death, Rinkart always looked to his Savior, and could thank God for the blessings he still had. "Now Thank We All Our God" began as a family prayer before meals, and later was sung as a national thanksgiving at a celebration service when the Thirty Years' War ended. With the exception of "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," it is the most widely sung hymn in Germany, sung on numerous occasions of national rejoicing.

Rinkart wrote more than sixty hymns, but "Now Thank We All Our God" is his best known. It is a testament to his faith that, after such misery, he was able to write a hymn of abiding trust and gratitude toward God. He died in December 1649, in the place he loved most — Eilenburg.

St. Paul wrote, "but in all things, give thanks," not because we should be thankful for all the bad things that happen, but rather, because in all the hard times, we have a God who is with us, and when we sing praises or lift up our prayers, we come into the Presence of God whose peace is past all human understanding. Amen

### **THANKSGIVING PRAYER**

For the bounties of forest and field  
For the fruits of labor and the rewards of grateful toil,  
we give Thee thanks. Amen

*—written on the last day of Summer, 2022*

