

**A WIDER EXPRESSION of THANKS**

My guess is that happy people give thanks to the Lord more readily than unhappy ones. Recently, someone took a poll among the residents of our 50 states and discovered that those living in Utah are the happiest. We, in Pennsylvania, rank 32<sup>nd</sup>, right after Florida and Illinois, and just before Alabama and North Carolina. Alaska ranks ahead of us. West Virginia ranks the last. Why?

What makes people happy or unhappy? There is a whole list of things, of course. "Different strokes for different folks." Nevertheless, it all boils down to our attitude toward God's world around us. As the Reign of God is within us, - so is happiness. And, so is our gratitude.

For us Christians, our relationship with our God is reflected in our relationships within society and, especially, within our Church. How can we be grateful to God if we are not happy within the assembly that the Lord has called together and through which we experience his activity? Might that be a key in Utah's high ranking? As for me, I am happy (and, therefore, thankful) that I belong to the Assembly of Believers called the Roman Catholic Church.

I am grateful that our Church is able to insist on certain fundamental truths and traditions while, at the same time, recognize the richness of other Christian traditions and allow them to be expressed within the one Church. This has been demonstrated most recently by our Holy Father's setting up a special accommodation for those of the Anglican tradition.

Likewise, I am grateful that our Church, today, does not view science as an enemy of religion. Both science and religion are about the same truth, even though from different perspectives. Religion and science compliment each other, - not always recognized. The discoveries of Gregor Johann Mendel, an Augustinian Priest in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, form the foundation of the modern science of genetics. Many accept the "Big Bang" theory as to how the universe came to be. But, few know that it was a Roman Catholic priest who proposed it in the late 1920's. And, the list goes on.

Recently, the Vatican called in experts (Catholic and others) to study the possibility of extraterrestrial alien life and its implication for the Church. This, without being threatened that there, actually, might be such life elsewhere. As one participant put it, it was appropriate that the Vatican should host such a meeting. I am grateful for that.

My gratitude for being called to be a member and leader within our Church has its concrete expression within our local Diocesan Church. This Church has been a source of blessings for me, as well as heartaches, - all of which have nurtured me in my growth. That is why I am staying here in my retirement.

I have seen that same nurturing take place among our Faithful. Through all the challenges that we have had to face, they continue to trust in their God and show their gratitude by being supportive of their Church. I think that we would rate at the top of being one of the happiest dioceses. That speaks volumes about our gratitude to the Lord, our God. Thank you for your faithfulness, and may we all have a very blessed Thanksgiving Day.