COLLEGE OF
Saint Benedict

Month of Gratitude Email Series
November 2014

Awareness of God

To look for God not in the abstract but in the ordinary events of every day.
"We believe that the divine presence is everywhere." R. B. 19

In the chaos of the commitments we make in life — work, family, friendships, relationships — it's easy to become overwhelmed and unsure of God's presence in our lives. Sometimes, on our hardest days, it can be a challenge to feel thankful for much of anything. Maybe you are dealing with health problems. Maybe you are a parent and your children exhaust you. Maybe you feel unsatisfied in your workplace. Whatever your struggles might be, by seeking out and recognizing small moments of God's grace, we can experience gratitude for our lives right where they are at this moment in time—imperfect and challenging as they might be.

Where have you seen God's grace in your life today? How does recognizing God's grace deepen your experience of gratitude in the everyday moments of your life?

Community Living

To become who we are by our relationships with others.
"Let all things be common to all." R. B. 33

While it may be clichéd, it's true: no one is an island. Our communities, whether they be family, friends, neighbors or coworkers, play a vital, integral part of our lives. We live, work and play in community with others, and our communities very often define a large part of who we are.

Take a moment and consider all the communities in your life. How do your communities strengthen you? What are you thankful for in your communities?

Dignity of Work

To appreciate the dignity of work in God's creation.
"...they live by the labor of their hands." R. B. 48

Each of us is called to work in our lifetime. Whether you work as an executive, a teacher, a nurse, an at-home parent or a combination of these, your days can be full of work that might be draining, difficult and unpleasant. Even for those of us who genuinely enjoy the work we do, it can be hard. However, when we are dedicated to doing our best in whatever work we do, our work brings us dignity and purpose.

Think about the work you do. What grace do you find in it? What gifts do you bring? And what gifts does your work give you?

Hospitality

To offer warmth, acceptance and joy in welcoming others.
"Let all...be received as Christ." R. B. 53

Hospitality is one of the most celebrated values in the Benedictine community, and the "Bennie/Johnnie spirit of welcoming" is one thing that makes the CSB/SJU campuses such special places. As an alumna, I can look back and remember being a student on campus and saying 'hi' to everyone I passed. It's just what we did. This welcoming spirit forges friendships, strengthens bonds and draws us closer to each other. Without it, we can get used to our comfort zones of close friends and family members. We can forget to think of those in our life who may be in need of a welcoming gesture, kindness and warmth.

How has someone in your life welcomed you and showed you hospitality? Who regularly shows you kindness and a graceful spirit? Take time to reflect on how the kindness of others, no matter how small, blesses your life.

Listening

To hear keenly and sensitively the voices of persons and all created beings.
"Listen ... with the ear of your heart." R. B. Prologue

One of the greatest gifts we can give to and receive from others is listening with kindness and compassion. By listening to those around us -- friends, family or other individuals who cross our paths, we can deepen our relationships with others and with our self. We all have unique voices and insights that have a place in our world.

Who listens to you on a regular basis? How does having a compassionate ear bring greater clarity to your life? How do you listen to others? How do you listen to yourself?

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Moderation

To be content with living simply and finding balance in work, prayer and leisure.
"All things are to be done with moderation." R. B. 48

In today's society, we often get the message that "more is always better" and we "can't have too much of a good thing." Often, we are so focused on the things we want that we overlook the blessings we already have. It's easy to become discouraged, as there will always be someone out there who has a nicer home, a more glamorous job and a bigger bank account. However, when we balance work and play, and acknowledge the everyday blessings in our lives, we can truly live our lives to the fullest. We will recognize the abundance that surrounds us - whatever abundance may look like in the life that you lead.

What small, simple blessings bring you joy? How does your leisure time help you to appreciate your work? How does your work enrich the time you spend at play?

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Respect for Persons

To respect each person regardless of class, background or professional skill.
"No one is to pursue what is judged best for oneself, but instead, what is better for someone else." R. B. 72

Respect for all people is the cornerstone of a good and just society. Without respect, we can't see each other or ourselves clearly, and we can't work toward a common goal or create a sense of community. We live in a world that is wonderfully and remarkably diverse, filled with people who are different from each other in endless ways. Regardless of our differences, each of us has talents, a voice, and innate value that deserves honor and respect.

Who in your life regularly shows you respect? How has someone's respect for you empowered or inspired you? What choices do you make that show respect for yourself?

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Stability

To cultivate rootedness and a shared sense of mission.
"To stand firm in one's promises." R. B. 58

The saying says to "bloom where you're planted." This could mean deepening your sense of purpose in your workplace, strengthening the bonds of your family or finding deeper connections within your place of worship. Even if you travel frequently or spend your life far from the place you once called home, finding a stable connection to a community with a common mission can help bring rootedness to your life.

Where do you find stability and balance in your life? How do your roots strengthen you? What helps you to stand firm as you weather the storms of life?

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Stewardship

To appreciate and to care lovingly for all the goods of this place.
"Regard all utensils as if they were the sacred vessels of the altar." R. B. 31

We live in a culture of "stuff." Our fast-paced, technology-filled world can make the things we have seem ever more disposable. And it's easy to always want more. But in showing good stewardship of the things we have, our homes, cars, or our "toys," we can appreciate that these things are blessings. When we take pride in caring for our things, we bring order and peace to our lives. We can more fully recognize our good fortune.

What material blessings do you have in your life? How do the bits and pieces of your life bring value? How do you carefully care for and appreciate your belongings?

Peace

To strive for peace on all levels: with self, others, and God. R. B. Prologue

What do you think of when you think of peace? A crisp fall morning? Is it quality time spent with family and friends? Maybe it's memories of your time at CSB/SJU, walking the quiet path by the CSB Main or a chapel walk at SJU on a snowy day. Or maybe peace to you is something to work toward - a goal for yourself and the greater world. Peace is one of our highest callings as human beings and global citizens. Finding peace within ourselves means accepting ourselves for who we are, and striving for peace with others. It's a fundamental part of making the world a better place.

How do you find peace in your daily life? How does the peace you find in your life enrich you as a person? How do you bring peace to your community?

Justice

To work toward a just order in our immediate environment and in the larger society.
"...that in all things God may be glorified" R. B. 57

When we were young, most of us learned the Golden Rule: treat others the way we ourselves would like to be treated. But what happens when we witness someone else being treated in an unfair or unjust way? How do we respond? Part of treating others well can mean standing up for those who might be in a time of need. Maybe that means helping to support family or friends through difficult times, especially in circumstances that are beyond their control. Or maybe it means working for social causes in ways that benefit others who are disadvantaged. We all have the power to be an advocate for someone or for a group of people, in ways big and small.

Who in your life has advocated for justice when you have needed it? In what ways do you help support or stand up for causes that are important to you? How does this enrich your life?