

# Upfront

It's an awkward thing to write about God or Faith or religion in a secular magazine. Conventional etiquette suggests one should steer clear of religion and politics in "polite" conversation. Some add a third no-no with respect to public discourse: Money. The older I get, the more impolite I become, I suppose, as I sometimes discuss them all. But I try to touch on these three third rails without generating too many sparks. So, I will delve cautiously into spirituality in the next few paragraphs, be forewarned.

It will be Thanksgiving soon if you're reading this on or about its release date. According to a statistical survey taken this year, Thanksgiving is America's favorite holiday, with a 79 percent "approval rating," with Christmas and Memorial Day in a two-way tie for second at 78. It's probably a combination of family, food, football, fall weather, and no preparatory present-buying angst. But it might be more subtle and scientific: Gratitude feels good.

According to a Harvard Medical School release: "In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships."

Thanksgiving, then, or giving thanks, is good for us in measurable ways. It's not obvious which is the chicken, and which is the egg. Does one feel grateful because one is happy, or is one happy to be grateful? Not that it matters. Gratitude might be both cause and effect.

Here's the uncomfortably personal anecdote I warned about at the top of the page: For much of my life, I prayed for things I wanted (from God). Intercessions that would yield good outcomes for me or my loved ones. It occurred to me at Mass last Sunday that my prayers have changed noticeably in recent years. They are like extended thank-you notes to God. Statements of thanksgiving rather than entreaties around wants and needs, in the main. Interestingly, coincidentally, all the stuff Harvard says accompanies gratitude seem to be accruing to me.

I look forward to sitting down to celebrate the spirit of gratitude, which will inevitably and incongruently lead to loosening my belt. I share here scenes from last Thanksgiving, knowing that this year brings even more reasons to give thanks.

*Scott A. Lauretta*



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