

32963 – Nov. 20, 2008 – Thanksgiving
By Revs. Casey and Bob Baggott

On Goats and Gratitude

We've plundering our files of sayings, quotations, poems, and articles – looking for something fascinating and fresh to offer on an old subject: Thanksgiving. What more can be said on this topic that hasn't been said to us many times over? After all, each year at this season, we are asked to recognize how very much we have and we are told we should therefore feel grateful. Yet, we've observed something: gratitude isn't a direct result of receiving many blessings in life. On the contrary, some who have every imaginable material blessing are ungrateful, and some who have very little to call their own are supremely grateful. How does this happen? Well, here's a little story we heard some time ago that may explain it.

It's a story about a poor man and his family who lived in a little village sometime in the early part of the last century. It seems the man went to his rabbi one day, complaining: "Life, rabbi, is unbearable for me. There are nine of us, all living together in one squalid, awful little room. In this miserable, crowded place we must all wash, and eat, and sleep, and cook. The family I love is unhappy and restless and quarrelsome. What am I to do, rabbi?"

The rabbi thought for a moment and then inquired, "Do you have a goat?" "Yes," replied the man. "Good," said the rabbi. "Take the goat to live with you and your family in the room." The man is incredulous. But the rabbi insists: "Do as I say," said the rabbi, "and come back in a week."

A week later the man comes back to see the rabbi. But he's now more distraught and frustrated than ever! "We can't stand it," he cries to the rabbi. "The goat is filthy. Life is worse than ever, with that goat in the house." So, the rabbi says, "Alright, go home and let the goat out. Then come back and see me in a week."

A week later the man returns, and he is radiant! "Life is beautiful," he tells the rabbi, beaming. "We enjoy every minute of it now that there is no goat. Everything is just right, with only nine of us in that perfectly beautiful room!"

Those of us who have had, somewhere along the way, to put up with an old goat (those irritating, troubling circumstances that make life seem miserable) can see the wisdom of this little story, can't we? Appreciation of life is only loosely related to outward circumstances. What matters more than our actual circumstances, (which change with time, growing better, worse, better again) is the perspective we take.

If you could maintain a constant attitude of gratefulness, despite your circumstances, would your life feel different? Isn't there something you might always, in all circumstances, be grateful for? Perhaps, if we can gratefully acknowledge God's utterly dependable and unchanging love for us, we do not deny hardships, but we are helped to transcend them. And it's not even so much that we owe it to *God* to be grateful. It's that we owe it to *ourselves*. Because a grateful disposition will change how capably, how effectively, how joyfully, we are able to live life.

Happy Thanksgiving! And please, be grateful!