

## EXPRESSING GRATITUDE AND GRACIOUSNESS

As children in Wisconsin, my siblings and I used to sing the old song with the / refrain "Count your blessings, name them one by one . . ."

Today, when I take time to consider the blessings that have / come my way - good health, good friends, and an abundance of opportunities for creative expression, I am filled with gratitude. / And gratitude is an excellent attitude to bring along when sharing time during the holiday. Recalling and re-experiencing your / blessings is a simple, effective way to do a positive attitude adjustment. As an American icon of prosperity consciousness, W. / Clement Stone, wrote:

"There is one thing over which each person has absolute, inherent control, and that is his mental / attitude."

When our attitude is appropriate to the season -- positive, friendly, upbeat, and gracious, it flavors our demeanor and our / talk. It trumps the emotional baggage we may carry, like the hurt we felt when Uncle Fred teased us, or / the resentment we felt when our older cousin snatched the last piece of pie.

To maintain a grateful and gracious / attitude, it helps to focus on positive topics and to set aside certain "hot-button" topics for another time.

These / hot topics include contentious political issues such as the Iraq war, immigration policies, and pro-life and pro-choice positions. / Topics like these are appropriate to a different forum but prove troublesome at gatherings of family and friends.

One of / the most gracious behaviors at holiday get-togethers is to give people your genuine attention, your caring presence. If someone / is sad or unhappy, showing them a sense of caring and concern can be transformative. As mystic and activist Simone / Weil wrote, "Those who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them / their attention."

It is almost certain that you still have some appreciations not yet expressed to certain relatives or friends. / How about telling them in a personal, low-keyed way? "Aunt June, I'll never forget the time you drove me / to the train station during a blizzard, then waited until the train left the station. I don't think I ever / expressed my appreciation for your help that night."

For table talk, many families have found it helpful to focus the / conversations toward topics of gratitude. One simple way to do this is to have everyone write "one thing I'm grateful / for" or "one person I'm

grateful for" on slips of paper or index cards, then for each person to draw / a card from a basket and read it aloud for all to hear. The cards can be written unsigned, if / you prefer. The main thing is to give voice to the gratitude.

Another possibility is to share readings, such as / poems and stories that capture the warm spirit of the holiday. A fine resource for these is Edward Bleier's book, / *The Thanksgiving Ceremony: New Traditions for America's Family Feast*. (2003)

When you frame the gathering of friends with / words that anchor the occasion in the heart, a hospitable climate is created, and the tone of the interaction is / changed accordingly.

Nearly 150 years ago, Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, wrote these Thanksgiving thoughts: /

"Let us first resolve: First, to attain the grace of silence; Second, to deem all fault-finding that does no / good a sin; Third, to practice the grace and virtue of praise."