

AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

**Sermon preached at 10.00am Sung Eucharist
St. Edmundsbury Cathedral
Sunday 16 February 2020**

The Oscars is one of my guilty pleasures. I know the whole thing is superficial and self-congratulatory. I know Hollywood is sexist and must grow in diversity. But I'm still captivated by the bright lights and the glamour. To be clear, I didn't stay up all night last Sunday. But on Monday morning I was quick to catch up with the results, including the fashion winners and losers. Two winners for me: the actress Janelle Monae stunning in sparkly silver gown with a haute hoodie, and Brad Pitt super cool as ever in classic DJ and a longer hair look.

Its fun to dress up, isn't it? Its fun to choose an outfit for a party. Weddings, baptisms, lots of occasions to wear something special. Up at the front here, clergy and choir are dressed up as usual.

But then comes this morning's Gospel reading. Jesus says "do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

Awkward moment! Actually, Jesus is not saying "don't get dressed up for a party". We know he liked a good wedding. And Jesus knew that we need to eat. He enjoyed meals and all the benefits of food. No, Jesus is getting at something deeper. He is talking about our priorities. He wants us to think about where we place our attention. "Strive first for the kingdom of God", Jesus says. Jesus is asking us a challenging question: do to live with a sense of anxiety or do you live with a sense of gratitude? Do you live worrying about what you lack or do you live aware of blessings?

Parents and godparents, aunts and uncles, grandparents, all of us adults have a great responsibility. It is our task to teach our children to live from a place of gratitude and blessing. It is our task to help our children to be aware of their worries and fears, but not to be dominated by them. It is our task to help our children learn how blessed they are, how much there is to be thankful for.

Spiritual guides like Richard Rohr teach us that gratitude is the foundation of all prayer. So Laura and Dominic, Genevieve, Christopher, Benjamin and Katrine, as parents and godparents your job is to teach Eva how blessed she is. And she is greatly blessed.

Be encouraged! The Christian mystic Meister Eckhart said "if the only prayer you say in your life is thank you. That is enough." This attitude of gratitude is available to us all. It's not rocket science. It's immediate and it's free.

In my experience, the early years of teaching children to say "thank you" are hard work. You quickly lose count of the number of times you ask, "and what do you say?" But the lovely, happy time comes when your children start to say thank you without being prompted. Thanks be to God!

Of course, we teach our children mainly by doing it ourselves. So, we must continue our own training in thankfulness. And we need to express that gratitude to people around us, including our children. Each morning be grateful for a new day and the possibilities it brings. During the day, notice the blessings all around: in other people, in nature, in the wonders of the world. At the end of each day, name what has been good.

This training in gratitude requires commitment and perseverance. It can be hard work resisting the negative forces within: forces that are quick to criticise negatively, quick to condemn. We have good days and bad days, our energy runs low and we get tired. But still we can be grateful – for the grace

that gets us through, for the assistance we need because we aren't perfect, and we do make mistakes. Children learn compassion and forgiveness from us, as well as gratitude.

“For all that has been thanks, and for all that will be yes.” “If the only prayer you say in your life is thank you. That is enough.” “Do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” ... your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. Strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness.”

May God's grace and love enable Eva to learn, through us, these things.

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