7 ways to say ‘thanks’ to God

Most of us were toddlers when we learned to say “please” and “thank you.”

We were a little older when we fell into the habit of asking, begging, nagging, whining, “Please, please, please, please, ple-e-e-e-e-e-ease!”

Older still when we began to try bargaining. If you give me this …” “If you let me do that …” Then, “I’ll never ask for anything else again.” (Yeah, sure.) “I’ll do my homework right after …” (Insert laugh here.)

Perhaps not surprisingly, our relationship with God tended to follow the same track. Almost always ready, willing and able to ask politely. More than a little slow with the thank-you note. If we even remembered to write it and mail it. Or email it. Or text it.

If we even remembered to say it with more than a passing “thank you” in the same tone and sincerity we may have used in years gone by when our mother would pointedly ask, “What do you say?”

So how do we – how can we – sincerely say “thanks” to our Heavenly Father? Well, thankfully our Creator has given us a lot of ways to do just that. Here are seven of them:

1. Go to Mass

No doubt you know the word “eucharist” is from the Greek for “thanksgiving” or “gratitude.” But, of course, uppercase-“E” Eucharist refers to Mass and the Blessed Sacrament. When the Catechism of the Catholic Church asks “What is this sacrament called?” its first answer is “Eucharist, because it is an action of thanksgiving to God.”

Great! Go to Mass. A done deal. Next.

Not so fast. It’s an action of thanksgiving, which certainly implies us doing something there besides stand, sit, kneel, walk up for Communion, stay for a closing hymn and head out the door. Without our actively taking part in the Mass – praying with others, offering our own private prayers, reverently receiving the Blessed Sacrament, joining in the singing – then we’re pretty much like that child blurting a fast and nearly thoughtless “thank you” to appease Mom.

2. Do what Jesus told us to do

Uh oh. What does that mean for us? Yes, he said take part in the breaking of the bread in memory of him (Lk 22:19), but he also mentioned something about “love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34).

What better way to show gratitude for the gift of faith than to live the Faith? How do we live it? Love as Jesus loved. And how do we do that? Find out by spending some time this year – each month, each week, each day – reading about how he did it. Spend time “praying” the Gospels.

Then, too, living the Faith – living our gratitude to God – means living the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Sometimes that can be particularly challenging, but other times it’s pretty simple. Small choices throughout the day can develop over time into virtuous habits that make us more inclined and better prepared to tackle those challenging opportunities.

3. Don’t put a gift from God in your sock drawer

What? Sometimes we receive a gift from a family member or friend and quietly tuck it away in a dresser drawer. It’s not something we need, want, know how to use or even like.

When we do that with a gift from God it runs counter to what Jesus taught in the Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30). The lesson? Use what God gives you!

Maybe he gave you an ability to teach so that, one way or another, you need to be a “teacher.” (Beyond the classroom, there are lots of ways to help others learn.) Maybe you’re quite the baker. Or mechanic. Or listener. Or comic. Or motivator.

Sometimes a gift becomes a profession, but, not infrequently, it’s an avocation. (You’re the one who supplies those marvelous casseroles for funeral receptions.)

Pay attention to the talents God has given you, develop them, and use them to help others.

4. Say ‘thank you’ to others … and mean it

Consider this: In describing the Last Judgment, Jesus said, “What you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me” (Mt 25:45). So part of what you can easily do for others throughout this new year, which is this gift from God, is thank them. “Thank you” to the store clerk. Your child’s teacher. The Sunday homilist. And on and on.

5. Write it down

This makes a great New Year’s resolution. One that’s easy to keep track of. And hard to cheat on.

Even those who hold little stock in religion or spirituality have discovered keeping a daily journal or log of people, events and things for which they’re grateful helps them mentally and physically.

You – lucky you, thank God – have that added layer or, more accurately, that foundation of Catholicism. Jotting down a few things at the end of every day can be a prayer of thanksgiving. Why? Because you know the source of all goodness, blessings, grace and love.

6. Take care of yourself

Not taking your health for granted is a key way of thanking God for the priceless gift that is good health. Sometimes that's relatively simple. Paying a bit more attention to including fruits and vegetables in your diet. Flossing. Cutting back on screen time to get more sack time.

But sometimes taking care of yourself can take a lot of effort, such as getting into a program that helps a person overcome an addiction.

Going to a mental health professional to learn how to better handle past or current issues that can be physically, mentally or emotionally crippling is also a good step.

Taking care of yourself also means going to confession. Sometimes that's simple; sometimes so very, very difficult. Turning to God in that way is a form of self-care that can be easily overlooked but it's one that has, well, eternal consequences. What a great way to thank God for your immortal soul.

And, one more:

7. Avoid ingratitude

Try to be thankful and not fall into the habit of feeling like "I deserve this."

Thank God that God doesn't give us what we deserve!

This article originally appeared in OSV Newsweekly.