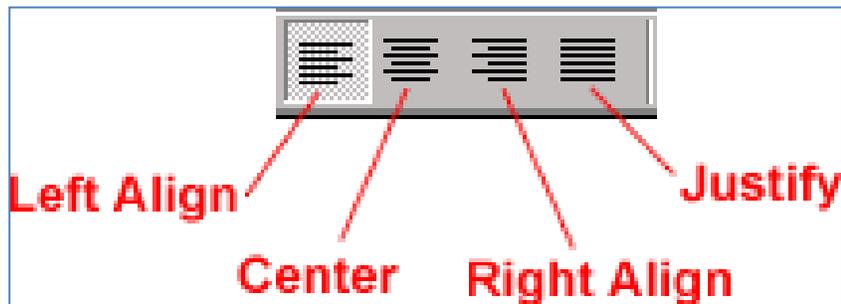


## It is Right and Just – A Thanksgiving Lesson Plan

**BIG IDEA** – Gratitude puts us in a healthy alignment with God and leaves no room for negativity.

### Engage

1. Provide each participant with a fistful of Cheerios and a straight edge/ruler or popsicle stick
2. Invite them to “spill” the Cheerios on their desk/table top in front of them.
3. Show them the following image (either copy and paste into a handout or project it) and tell them to use their straight edge to arrange their Cheerios so that they LEFT ALIGN:



4. Walk around to affirm that they arranged them correctly with the left edge straight.
5. Next, have them mix up the Cheerios again and then use their straight edge to arrange their Cheerios so that they RIGHT ALIGN.
6. Once again, walk around to affirm that they arranged them correctly with the right edge straight.
7. Have them mix up the Cheerios again and then use their straight edge to arrange their Cheerios so that they are JUSTIFIED.
8. Walk around to affirm that they arranged them correctly with both edges straight.
9. Based on that, invite them to define the word JUSTIFY/JUSTIFIED (*to line up perfectly, to straighten out, to make a perfect fit, and so on*). Be sure to write their suggested definitions on the board as you will be coming back to them shortly.
10. Explain that, in this lesson, we are going to use this activity to help us understand that, when it comes to giving thanks to God, “it is right and JUST.” (write the words on the board)

### Explore

1. Invite your participants to stand and ask them to engage in the following dialogue with you from the Mass (you take the PRIEST part). See if they can do this from memory or write the dialogue on the board ahead of time:

*Priest:* The Lord be with you.

*People:* **And with your spirit.**

*Priest:* Lift up your hearts.

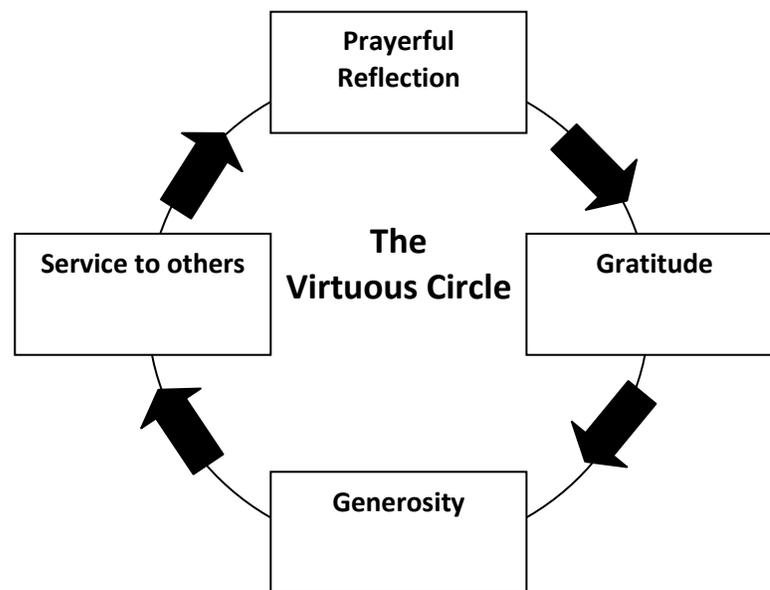
*People:* We lift them up to the Lord.

*Priest:* Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

*People:* **It is right and just.**

2. Ask if anyone can describe when this happens in the Mass (*at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer; near the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist*)
3. Say, ***The priest invites us to lift up our hearts...and he invites us to do that by giving WHAT to God? (Thanks) And we respond by saying that giving thanks to God is "right and \_\_\_\_\_?" (Just)***
4. Ask, ***Based on our Cheerios activity, what does it mean when we say that giving thanks to God is JUST?*** Point to their definitions on the board of the word JUSTIFY. (*it's the perfect thing to do, it lines us up with God, it straightens us out, it makes us a perfect fit with God, and so on*)
5. Explain that we begin the Eucharistic prayer by giving thanks because it puts us in perfect position/relationship with God from whom all blessings flow.
6. Write the word EUCHARIST on the board and explain that this is a Greek word which means THANKSGIVING. Point out that, for us Catholics, Thanksgiving is not just a once-a-year holiday but that it is something we do every time we celebrate Mass and that, by doing so, we seek to align ourselves perfectly with God and to be in proper relationship with him who is the giver of all gifts.
7. Ask, ***When do we usually say "Thank you" to someone? (when they have given something to us or done something for us) Why is it important to remember to say "Thank you" to people when they do something for us? (it reminds us that we are not self-sufficient/we rely on others)***
8. ***When we give thanks to God, it puts us in proper relationship with God, reminding us that He is the giver of all gifts and that we rely completely on Him for everything. Giving thanks to God is a practice that goes back thousands of years and was something that the Jewish people knew was important to do. In fact, the Book of Psalms is full of examples of giving thanks.***
9. Invite the participants to work in pairs to create Thanksgiving "bumper stickers" using one of the following passages from the Psalms. Distribute Bibles and have them search the examples and choose the passage they like best (examples are from NABRE).
  - a. "Does dust give you thanks or declare your faithfulness?" (Ps 30:10b)
  - b. "O Lord, my god, forever will I give you thanks." (Ps 30:13b)
  - c. "That I may praise God's name in song and glorify it with thanksgiving." (Ps 69:31)
  - d. "We thank you, god, we give thanks." (Ps 75:2)
  - e. "It is good to give thanks to the Lord." (Ps 92:1)
  - f. "Rejoice in the Lord, you just, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness." (Ps 97:12)
  - g. "Enter his gates with thanksgiving." (Ps 100:4a)
  - h. "Give thanks to the Lord, who is good, whose mercy endures forever." (Ps 106:1)
  - i. "I will give fervent thanks to the Lord." (Ps 109:30a)
  - j. "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good." (Ps 118:1a)
  - k. "I thank you, Lord, with all my heart." (Ps 138:1a)
  - l. "All your works give you thanks, Lord." (Ps 145:10a)
  - m. "Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving." (Ps 147:7a)
10. After participants present their bumper stickers, display them.
11. Next, explain that giving thanks – having an attitude of gratitude – is good for our spiritual, mental, and emotional health because it pushes negativity to the side, leaving no room for it in our hearts.
12. Do a simple demonstration to show how gratitude displaces other negative attitudes.
  - a. Invite participants to gather around a table.
  - b. Place a large empty dish pan on the table.
  - c. Place a large bowl of water inside the dish pan. The bowl should be filled to the rim.

- d. Place a couple of drops of dark water color in the bowl and stir it up explaining that it represents all of the negativity that we are sometimes surrounded by: despair, jealousy, hatred, anger, cynicism, etc.
  - e. Place a large empty sealed jar into the bowl (it will float) and explain that, if we are not filled with gratitude, we cannot push away the negativity.
  - f. Take the jar out, fill it with clear water, reseal it, and place it in the bowl...it will sink to the bottom and a good amount of the colored water will be displaced, overflowing into the dish pan.
  - g. Explain that when we are filled with gratitude, we displace negativity and force it away from ourselves.
13. Ask if anyone knows what the term “vicious circle” or “vicious cycle” means. *(something bad happens and our response causes more bad to happen and it keeps getting worse)*
  14. Say, **Instead of a “vicious circle,” giving thanks creates a “virtuous circle.”** Write the term on the board. Explain that the “virtuous circle” occurs when we pause to prayerfully reflect on our blessings. This reflection leads to gratitude (thanksgiving). Gratitude then leads us to generosity. Generosity leads us to serve others. That service then leads us to further reflection and the circle continues. Draw a diagram on the board:



### Reflect

1. Explain that, since the “Virtuous Circle” begins with prayerful reflection, it would be good for us to take some time to reflect prayerfully on our blessings.
2. Invite participants to quiet themselves and then to listen prayerfully to a recording of “All Good Gifts” (*Godspell*)
3. Provide participants with a small spiral notebook and tell them to use it as a gratitude journal. Invite them to begin now by listing at least 10 things that they are thankful for at this moment. Provide time to complete this and play some prayerful instrumental music in the background as they do so.

### Respond

1. Invite the participants to write out, on the bottom of the same page in their gratitude journal, what they can/will do in the days to come to show their gratitude by being of service to others.