

## Thanksgiving Day

“We Praise You, O God” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #785)

Thanksgiving 2015—What a blessing to be able to write a devotion on...‘blessings’! Another year has passed since we celebrated Thanksgiving 2014. But we don’t simply wait for the holiday to come around again. Every day is a celebration of thanksgiving for God’s unlimited blessings to us!

The hymn text, “We Praise You, O God” was written by Julia B. Cory who lived from 1882 to 1963. The *story* surrounding the writing of this hymn is relatively straight forward. In 1902 J. Arthur Gibson, the organist at Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City, asked the author to create a new hymn (using the rolling Dutch tune KREMSER) which could replace the traditional Thanksgiving hymn “We Gather Together”. Two weeks later “We Praise You, O God” was completed. It was sung on Thanksgiving Day in that congregation and has been popular throughout the nation ever since.

It’s my intent, though, to focus more on these *words* that were clearly penned from a truly grateful heart and which have served generations of grateful people who struggle with how to properly be thankful for the many blessings that are showered on us all.

What strikes me as I read the hymn text is the focus on God. “We Praise YOU...”; “We lay it before YOU...”; “YOUR holy name...”; “We worship YOU...”; “we bless YOU...”; YOU have been...(with us in trial and tempest); “YOU will not forsake us...”; “and with YOUR help...”; “With YOU, Lord, beside us...”; “YOU will not forsake us...”; “to YOU, our great Redeemer.

But the writer, Julia Cory, also calls for a response in our lives: “in grateful devotion our tribute we bring...”; “we lay it before you...”; “we kneel and adore you...”; “with voices united our praises we offer...”; “gladly our songs of thanksgiving we raise...”; “to YOU, our great Redeemer, forever be praise!

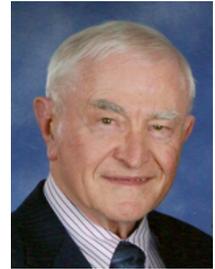
Ever since God has blessed me with retirement, I’ve been able to concentrate more fully on the texts of hymns as I sing them seated in the congregation, in contrast to my days accompanying them from the organ as the congregation sang “with voices united”. Even though the preparation of accompanying hymns always did include studying the texts, I continue to find, even now in my new role, fresh insights of devotion in the words that are contained in our congregational songs. This hymn is no exception.

When the challenges of everyday living tend to divert our focus from God, we can often be reminded to refocus our attention by saying the words of this hymn. When we forget to be grateful for our blessings, we can remember to say the words of this hymn. And aren’t many of our hymns a reminder to do the things which we tend to forget?

Blessings on a meaningful celebration of Thanksgiving in this year of our Lord 2015! As we focus on GOD, there is another set of words which could guide our celebration of the many blessings of God.

“Praise GOD from whom ALL blessings flow.  
Praise HIM all creatures here below.  
Praise HIM above ye heav’nly host.  
Praise FATHER, SON AND HOLY GHOST!  
Amen!

Nathan Eickmann  
Castle Rock, CO



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We praise you, O God, our Redeemer, Creator;  
in grateful devotion our tribute we bring.

We lay it before you,  
we kneel and adore you;  
We bless your holy name, glad praises we sing.

We worship you, God of our fathers, we bless you;  
through trial and tempest our guide you have been.

When perils o’ertake us,  
you will not forsake us,  
And with your help, O Lord, our struggles we win.

With voices united our praises we offer  
and gladly our songs of thanksgiving we raise.

With you, Lord, beside us,  
your strong arm will guide us.  
To you, our great Redeemer, forever be praise!

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Text: Julia B. Cory, 1882-1963, alt.

Tune: KREMSE Source: *Nederlandsch Gedenckclanck*, Haarlem 1626.

Both text and tune are in the public domain.

[This devotion was prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music. It may be downloaded and duplicated for local use.]