

A dozen years ago, about a week from today, actually, I met Fr. Steve for the first time. Nearly all of you have heard stories about our friendship, stories about how we became best friends -- basically, we walked up to each other and said, "wanna be best friends?" and then we were -- and there've even been stories about the rare times we didn't get along and how there's very few rifts in relationships that a sack of Krystal burgers can't fix. But what I don't think we've shared is just exactly how much this friendship has sustained us. Y'all've probably seen it in action, but Steve, I want you to know just how much I appreciate you sticking to us and making this friendship really last. See, when we graduated and went our separate ways, Steve made a point to come visit us in Arkansas about four times a year. I don't know this for certain, but I'm reasonably sure that he spent all of his vacation time those first three years on Becca and me. Well, he spent that vacation time coming to see our dog Cotton, but we benefited. We went his way once in a blue moon, but the driving was pretty much one-sided. And I know our friendship was made a little stronger each time. And then Becca and I made the decision to go on an adventure and move as far north as anyone has a right to, and Fr. Steve kept on visiting. In fact, it was at one of those visits that our bishop picked up on something special and set to work getting him connected with churches up here. It kinda blows my mind that we've ended up living so close. We get to meet up every week and sort out life's problems. For anyone wondering, sitting over there in the Rectory living room, Steve and I've come up with more than a few plans to set the world right, if only people would just listen to how brilliant we are.

But this year, this year has been a bear. Covid already had taken too much from us, from people we loved to things we just liked to do once in a while. And then Covid got too close to home, and it took away Christmas and Easter and a precious half-year of time with these folks I love. And it took away Rectory living room brilliance. Steve wanted to stop in, sometimes did, saying hi to Becca and then waving at me from outside the windows. He looked sad, and I felt sad, and I watched my friend carry so much he couldn't say. There were the dozens he's buried since the pandemic began, there were the many things that crowd a priest's mind in his own parishes, and now there were even more worries weighing heavy from my people here. And he carried them because he loved his friend. That was beautiful and brutal to watch from my sickbed. Normally, I'd help in some kinda way, but this year, this year I just couldn't. But he kept on carrying more than a single fella oughtta. You know what? I'm grateful, Best Friend, for the extra you did, but I also want to apologize for leaving you with too much to carry. I know, I didn't have much choice in the matter, but still. I'm sorry, and I am so, so grateful. For all those years of driving, for all those visits to love on the dogs, for picking up and moving to this heathen land, thank you. Thank you for being a friend.

I guess I should talk about Jesus for a minute, since I'm up here and all. Now, normally, I'd dig into these readings and really get at some of the good stuff. I might holler or make a bad pun. I'd certainly throw my hands around to emphasize a phrase, and I'd give y'all a glimpse into how my brain works -- a frightening thing to witness, I know. And if we're all lucky, once in a rare while, I might even come to the point. And the point, pretty much every week is gonna be some version of the same thing: love God, love your neighbor. So, Jesus tells these folks that storing up money is a bad deal, and Paul says it's idolatry, and while we're on idolatry, Hosea says that's bad, too. I mean, folks, this is Christian Scripture 101. Serve God above all else, don't let worldly things get between you and God, and don't let those same worldly things get between you and the people you love. I'm sure everyone in this room could recite the sermons Fr. Steve and I would preach on those worldly things. We've been around for long enough, you've gotten an idea of what to expect out of us.

But that psalm, especially that first line, that's where I want to lean in today. "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good." I don't think I do that near enough. For one thing, I'm a little overly fond of thanking myself, and I need to work on that. I need to work on saying thank you to the One From Whom All Good Things Flow. But also, I don't think I'm quite good enough at saying thank you to other people. So... Becca, thanks for going along with this whole ordination thing. St. Thomas', thanks for welcoming me, for getting me settled, for teaching me how to survive winter, for explaining what the blue lines in hockey mean, and for showing me just how generous and loving a church can be. I give thanks to the Lord for all y'all.

Those of you who've come in from farther afield, thanks for making the drive, thanks for bringing deviled eggs sure to be tasty enough to defend your honor, and thanks for making such a lovely life for my best friend in the whole wide world. And thank you for all the many ways you have brought me into your lives. I give thanks to the Lord for all y'all, too.

And Steve, hi best friend! Thanks for exploring every area grocery and convenience store so I'd know where to find the best produce and frozen shrimp and even okra. Thanks for loving my dogs and for supporting my marriage. Thanks for challenging me, for sharpening my ideas, for making fried chicken in a godforsaken land. Thanks for sharing plants and driving by the land to make sure it hasn't floated away. Thanks for loving my people. Thanks for caring for them, for feeding them, for listening to them, and especially, when it was needed, for burying them. Steve, thank you. Today I give thanks to the Lord for you especially.

In a normal sermon in a normal week, now's about the time I'd start wrapping up. I'd promise to say one more thing and then sit down, or maybe I'd just lower my voice and slow down a little, hitting each word with just enough oomph for you to know it mattered. But today, today's about gratitude, about just how beautiful life becomes when loving God and loving neighbor feels this sweet. We're gonna share a little more of this beautiful tradition, we're gonna share a meal here, and then we're gonna go next door and share in some good natured egg-citement. And as we're chomping on those deviled eggs and exchanging recipes and gossiping a little about how gauche it was for Fr. Steve to slip chili powder into St. Thomas' eggs when no one was looking, we're gonna remember why we're all here. We're all here because a dozen years ago, two heathens became best friends at seminary. We're all here because Steve couldn't stand to be more than a day's drive away from Cotton the dog. And we're all here, really, because God is good, and we are forever, deeply, grateful. And Steve, thank you. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!