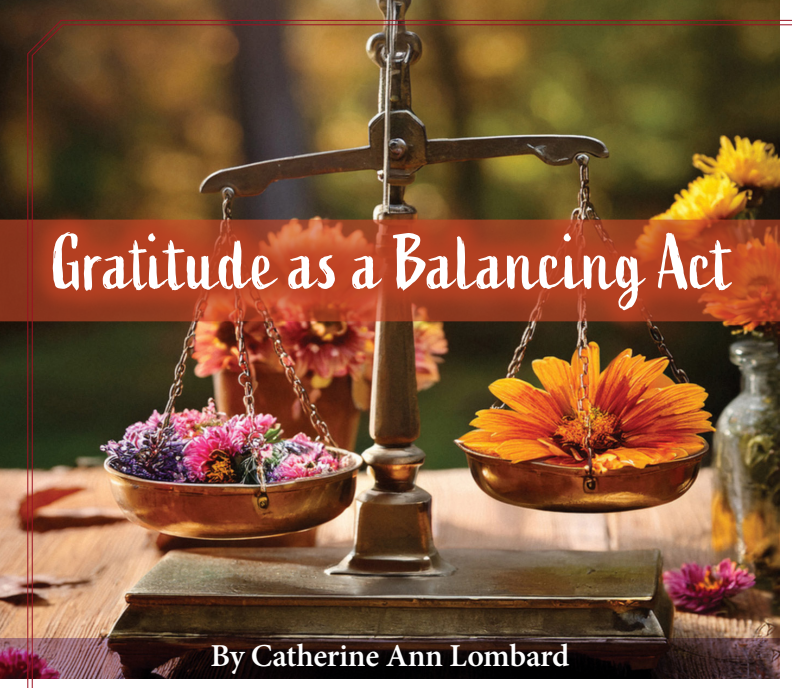


Gratitude as a Balancing Act

By Catherine Ann Lombard

Autumn is a particular time of year. Nature is yielding its last fruits before winter at the same time the land is becoming fallow. In the Italian countryside where I live, the apple, medlar, and persimmon trees are full of ripe fruit while their branches are already bare of leaves. My husband and I are doing our best to collect what we can, but much of the bounty will inevitably end up feeding the crows or dropping to nourish the grassy fields.

This dynamic interplay between abundance and scarcity extends to our animal neighbors. Local porcupines often manage to eat the fallen walnuts and almonds before I have a chance to collect them. They instinctively know that winter promises to be long and their food meager. Piles of almond shells on the ground display their midnight gorging.

In our own lives, we might at times find ourselves struggling with scarcity—feelings of not having enough time, money, health, love, or recognition. Even when we have enough, we often feel as if we need more, that tomorrow there will be nothing left. So we consume and purchase, possess, save, and hoard.

Even as the fear of scarcity is part of our fragile existence, so, too, is our struggle to accept abundance. When someone pays us a genuine compliment, we may blush and demur, finding it difficult to accept appreciation of our gifts and talents. We might actually sabotage



the love, job promotion, and success we deserve and long to have.

The key to balancing scarcity and abundance is gratitude. Theologian Walter Brueggemann wrote: "The power of the future lies not in the hands of those who believe in scarcity but of those who trust God's abundance." The Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore explained about abundance: "Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it." Once we become grateful for the divine abundance that provides us with what we *need* (not what we *believe* we need), then we can develop the ability to accept, feel satiated, and hold a place of inner peace.

You are probably familiar with the Lord's Prayer, also referred to as the Our Father. We might carefully reflect upon one line: "Give us today our daily bread."

So much is held in this simple sentence. First, we are asking for bread, the staff of life. Perhaps the most basic food that can support life, bread has accompanied our meals for millennia.

Second, this bread is enough for just *one* day—enough to meet our needs for the present. We do not ask for enough bread to last until next year. Or for enough bread to go on holiday or fill our freezer. We are asking for *daily* bread so that we can remain grateful every day for what we have in the present moment, which is just enough. When we ask daily for what we need, we are also continually reinforcing our relationship with the higher source of all the abundance in our lives.

Third, we ask for *our* daily bread. We are not just asking that we ourselves have enough. We are asking that there is enough for our entire community, for the entire world.



Meanwhile, the nights are growing longer, and cold winds are blowing down from the nearby mountaintops. My husband and I are busy filling crates of persimmons to bring to the nuns at a local monastery. Grapes from abandoned vineyards are collected and turned into juice. The abundance of walnuts allows me to fill bags for friends. It is truly a time of thanksgiving.

Daily gratitude allows us to balance the dynamic interplay of having just enough with the experience of abundant divine supply. With this practice, we learn to gratefully receive all of creation—the flood of morning light, the whirlwind of birdsong, and (with a bit of luck) apples ready to be picked from a nearby tree.



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