THOUGHTS OF DECEMBER, 2010

1. The Lord uses our knowledge of needs to draw us together as church and before Him as His children. Without having or knowing of needs we probably would not pray as much as we do. That’s fine. It means that the Lord can get our attention any time He wants it.

 A point: Try to not get problem-focused when you pray. Yes, it’s hard to not focus on our painful foot when praying, but look the Lord directly in the face and talk to Him in your pain. Even in our pain it is all about Him and for His purpose.

1. This is respiratory disease season – colds and the flu. Remember to carry a handkerchief or tissue to use when coughing or sneezing. Coughing and sneezing throws out minute droplets of germ-filled mucus which increase our already germ-laden environment. Love your brother [and any enemies present] by covering your mouth and nose by an absorbent material.

 On the other hand, love yourself by not placing those germs in your nose and eyes. Those two portals are the route for entrance of respiratory germs into our body. Don’t wipe your eyes or pick your nose unless you wash your hands first with soap and water. Almost all of our viral respiratory illnesses are self-caused.

 This may not appear so, but it is a very spiritual Thought. A brother has been absent from several meetings the past week because of a respiratory ailment. He was vital to our deliberations, but we had to do without him. Everything is spiritual, and thus have spiritual meaning and consequences.

1. It seems that the Lord’s progress of things here in Corpus Christi is such that more of us will begin to specialize and reduce our generalizing. That means that the toe will be able to be the toe instead of having to be also the eye or an ear. That’s communion. That’s body life. I see it already, as some are withdrawing from certain God-given responsibilities and focusing on specific callings and tasks. Paul promoted this sort of responsibility, such as to the Corinthian saints.
2. I have been praying and working [but hopefully not pushing] to help bring about brotherly unity among the saints of various denominations, such as Catholics and Protestants. There have been some wonderful individual results, but not nearly that which the Lord will develop. So, I have been going easier on that part of God’s project of treating Corpus Christi as one parish.

 It may be that the Lord will first continue his renewal among the disparate groups, and then bring us together in more brotherly fellowship.

1. I know that this will be an incomplete Thought, but it is accurate within its defined limits.

 There is a tension [due to our being yet in the body of this flesh] between various ministries. The thrust of the pastoral ministry is to draw the flock together into a family. The thrust of the evangelists’ ministry is to send the sheep outward. The body needs both [and more] and they are needed in harmony. In the flesh, they work contrary to one another. In the spirit, the pastor gives the evangelist lots of freedom to explore, develop, and to “stick his neck and others’ out.” At the same time, the evangelist is responsible for maintaining a submissive unity with the pastoral ministry.

 Thank you, Lord, for impossibilities. You do all things well.

1. It is probable that we are not imagining the spiritual power that comes when brothers are united in life, exercising sacrificial love, and laboring to keep the bond of the Spirit. That is so pleasing to the Lord that He gives LIFE where He finds such. See Psalm 133.
2. “The righteous run to repentance.” That was spoken by the Lord to a brother who was at first reluctant to tell a sister she had to repent. He did, she did, and then the Lord healed her physical problem.
3. When we are not amazed at what the Lord does, we are doing too much our selves or think that we are doing what He is actually doing.
4. If you are among the righteous, you have learned to not argue with the unrighteous. Your experience has taught you that you will be dragged down to their level and beaten because of their greater experience on that level. And, don’t agree with them for the sake of agreement. That would make you both wrong. Just listen to them, urge them further, and help them to clarify their points, letting them hear themselves and their reasoning processes. It may be that they will soon hear enough of themselves and realize that they are not as bright as they think. If so, they may learn something about themselves – at least how they should better behave around you.
5. The difference between knowledge and wisdom can well be described by the cook who knew that tomatoes are a fruit but would never put them in the fruit salad.
6. Sin can be birthed when we decide that those voices in our head actually are good ideas – better than those which the Holy Spirit put into the heads of those men who penned Scripture. That’s not age-dependent either, because age is no detriment to hearing, learning and doing something stupid. The same Holy Spirit, Who never changes and never lies and never compromises on moral matters, still puts His ideas into minds. They agree with that which He said to those Old and New Testament saints. A Bible lover who is sensitive to the Spirit has little difficulty knowing the Way – John 7:17.
7. Luke 14:26 is a delightful and clear little verse that differentiates between “coming to Jesus” and “walking with Jesus.” The first is often equated with being born again, and the second with discipleship. Whichever way you see those things, it is clear that there is a distinct difference to the Lord, which makes it important to us. In that verse, the Lord seems to be saying “whosoever will may come” and “whosoever will may be my disciple.” We know that it is necessary that the Father draw us, and all is by grace, including our believing upon Him. But that gap between being one of His and one of His disciples is larger than we think. This verse shows us the reality of that gap. Compare it to Exodus 32:27, where the same extreme love and obedience was called for. Matthew 28:19 was not the first time that the Lord revealed the cost of walking with Him – discipleship, loving Him with all of our mind, possessions, relationships, etc., etc. After all, did He not do the same Himself – Matt. 12:46-50? Is not that His only interest and purpose?
8. “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you. But when you give a reception [or Christmas dinner], invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you, ..” – Luke 14:12-14.

 The Lord made that verse real for us many years ago. It does not say that we should never invite our friends, family and rich neighbors, but that we will lose our reward for that good act when we receive an in-kind invitation.

 The Lord wants us to labor for, receive and lay up rewards, as He did for Himself. He, the Lord, our example, has received great reward(s) for His righteousnesses and wants the same for us. He guarantees those rewards for those who will follow Him. Rewards are for performances. They are not gifts. They are earned. Actions, not hearts’ desires, produce rewards.

1. Here are some table games for use when levity is called for, when manners need to be learned, or when love needs honing.
2. Throughout the meal, have only one conversation at a time. This develops patience, conversational manners, politeness, and love.
3. Don’t ask for anything to be passed to one’s self. That requires love on everyone’s part as they become considerate of others. It also sharpens the mind. Ingenious diners will develop the habit of saying to someone at the far end of the table [who is near the beans], “Bill, would you care for some beans?” That usually creates the awareness of, “Please pass the beans.”
4. When a new topic is started, it is not changed to another topic until at least 3 persons have addressed the first topic. Following up on a topic before starting another shows concern for the person more than the topic.
5. This is a toughie. No one is to use “I,” “me,” “my,” or “mine.” That cuts to the center of “self.”
6. It’s a display of basic honesty when someone who is in a difficult place of body or soul just stops long enough to say to himself, to others or to the Lord: “Why am I in this predicament,” or “What did I do to end up here?” Instead, in that difficult place, it’s a temptation to just say: “Who got me into this,” or “How do I get out of this.”

 You already see what lacks there, starting with a self-evaluation [Holy Spirit revelation to the intellect], then repentance [Holy Spirit conviction to the heart], then coming to a sense of direction [new openness to the Holy Spirit], working to verify or clarify that course of action [adding our education, experience and intelligence], and then taking action [“blood, sweat and tears”].

1. In Spanish, you cannot say that you “love” that which is incapable of loving you in return. You cannot “love” your favorite shoes or ice cream, for example, but you can “like” or “appreciate” them. But, you can love your dog or a human person. I find that interesting. It should be added that due to influence from the English language, some “love “of objects has crept into the Spanish language.
2. When I was a boy, I heard and used the phrase, “That boy is showing his behind.” That meant, in those years, that someone was embarrassing himself in some way, in any way. Nowadays, with some youngsters wearing their trousers down to their knees [it seems], it is literal, not a metaphor.
3. While on clothing, how about shoes? There is a saying that goes like this: “A man who wears tight shoes will do anything.” It seems like it means it takes a tough, mean man to wear tight shoes, so you can expect him to be the kind who would do anything bad.

 Still on shoes, do you remember the saying, referring to a person who has a mean look on his face, “His shoes must not fit?”

1. A fine brother, who is a pastor of a large congregation, has said to his flock several times: “When I am right, it is a blessing to you. When I am wrong, it will test you.” Pastors are not always right, but they are always “the Lord’s anointed.” See 1 Samuel 24:6, 10; 26:9, 16; 2 Samuel 1:14; and Psalm 105:15. That applies to more than pastors.
2. Our local U. S. Congressman, who had been in office for 20-25 years, being re-elected every 2 years and always winning by a landslide, was voted out of office this year. An inexperienced opponent won handily. There are probably several reasons why the Lord did that [remember that all authority is of God – Rom. 13:1], and I want to put forward one.

 A few years ago that congressman moved his political office from Corpus Christi to Brownsville, where his political base was expanding beyond the one in Corpus Christi. See 2 Samuel 24.

1. There is a certain anointing in many pastors of small congregations that equips them for small congregations only. It can be said of pastors of medium-sized congregations and pastors of large congregations. As that tendency was noticed, the saying developed, “Never put a captain of 10s over 1,000s because they will whittle down to 10.”

 As usual, that church observation is also applicable outside the church, in business or wherever. Some of us are anointed for small, medium or large jobs. There is an associated saying that goes, “He continued getting promoted until he was promoted beyond his ability.”

1. When things just won’t work, and you have applied due diligence, listen to the Lord. He may be saying: “Stop chasing it. Let it come to you.”
2. I think that we use the word “integrity” in a more narrow way than it should be used. Our common usage means “honest,” but a more comprehensive use would mean “complete and balanced.”

 Psalm 15:2(a) says that we are to have integrated personalities [to have integrity]. That’s a good thing to see in a saint. It shows maturity, stability and reliability. It means that there is not a significant area of one’s soul that lags behind all of the other areas of our character.

 Examples: Someone may be totally honest, but if he beats his children and dishonors his wife, he is not integrated. He does not have integrity. Someone may be a very capable physician, but if he overcharges his patients or does not provide full-time medical coverage for them, he does not have integrity.

 In our souls we have many characteristics/character traits. Those many traits do not rise or decline in perfect tandem with one another. In some areas we improve faster than other areas, while some areas lag behind the pack. That’s normal but, when we have grown in all or almost all areas but lag behind significantly in one or a few, we are dis-integrated.

 Jesus was perfectly integrated. He was whole and normal. He had integrity.

1. This is an oldie. In their old age, two Bills were talking over their life experiences. The $100. Bill said, “I have had a good life: nice house, luxury cars, great vacations and ate at expensive restaurants. The $1. Bill said, “All I did was go to church, go to church, go to church.” The $100. Bill said, “What’s a church?”
2. Despite trends in economics and politics, don’t despair or try to isolate yourself from life’s happenings. We may go down the tubes as a nation, but we may not. We have been the source of so much human character and creativity and liberty that God’s grace may yet bring a breakthrough, even in our lifetime. We may yet recall the Source of our blessings.

 One evidence of grace would be that we learn from our and others’ history, so that we do not try political and economic approaches that have failed and failed again. Some of those approaches have been tried from the ancient to the modern world, and have failed every time. For example, you cannot create wealth by printing money. That always leads to economic disaster, and yet our leaders keep trying it again and again. Isn’t that a definition of insanity, that the same thing is tried over and over, hoping to get different results?

 Other examples are socialized medicine, state education, trade protectionism and high taxation. Each presents itself with the appearance of being a solution to human-caused problems. Each looks to government to provide solutions that only hard work, faith, honesty, and freedom can provide.

1. On the other hand, every year the message of Jesus Christ is covering more of the world. That is a result of blood, sweat, tears, faith and that always-present grace. It’s not only Jesus that we preach, but also teach religious principles that lead to free and virtuous societies characterized by individual liberty. The Word and the Spirit permeate every person and part of society.

1. Politics is not going to save us, in any area or to any degree. Among other reasons for the failure of father politics is that politicians are followers, not leaders.
2. Most of us believe that God can do anything; that He has done miracles before and can do them again. We know He can. It’s just that we don’t know if He will do it in our situation. So, in what are we to have faith? Is it in that He has done it before and will do it again? Is it in the fact that His promises are in the Bible? If it is not in those things, is it that God will do something? Where, of all the things of God, is our faith to be placed?

 You are ahead of my typing. You know that it is in Him and His love. You know that He is going to do the very best for you in your situation. You get your usual A+.

1. Israel has a huge new gas field off its Mediterranean shore. Its reserves are estimated at 450 billion cubic meters – twice the size of the most recent find earlier this year. Of all the gas fields discovered in deep waters worldwide in the past 10 years, this is the largest.

 This makes Israel a world-market supplier of natural gas, multiplies its national income, reduces its own electric costs, greens them environmentally, and open up many fields of endeavor. That last blessing is perhaps the most important to the world, because it frees the already fruitful and inventive Jewish imagination to become even more imaginative.

 For the allegorically minded of us, this large field has been named “Leviathan,” and the smaller one, “Tamar.”

1. Futuristic prophecy is prediction with roots. Here goes one: With our own eyes we will see the world accept the rule of law, property rights, and limited government, which will result in worldwide economic prosperity. It will be a total dictatorship, with freedom for every citizen. Because that sounds and is impossible, you know that it will take King Jesus to do it.

 Why am I so sure of this? Because, even though the prospect of such is slim as long as the man of sin reigns on earth, there is coming a time when the Man of Righteousness will reign. His kingdom on earth will be like the one in heaven. His will will be done throughout the earth. It will take some time, perhaps a number of years [because He will not restrict human freedom while bringing all things on earth under his dominion), but it is coming. Saints, we will see it with our own eyes.

 The “by faith” vanguard of that kingdom is now here. We Christians live in it; are citizens of it. It is our full-time commitment to our Invisible King and to life in His invisible kingdom that prepares us to reign with Him in Jerusalem during the “by natural” fulfillment of that kingdom.

1. If you are ever tempted to think that your life of righteousness and service has not amounted and will never amount to anything, don’t forget the Rule Of Returns On Past Investments. Our actions continue producing results for generations to come. Our multitude of “little touches” influence generations of those who will spread more of the same.
2. In the mid 1900s, liberation theology [a blend of Marxism and Christianity] began to thrive. By the late 1980s, it had almost completely overrun the Latin American Roman Catholic Church. At the same time, American R. C. seminaries were being steadily taken over by political and theological progressives. Some Protestant seminaries began flirting with the same ideas.

 While looking for the root-cause of the blend, I found it enlightening that the founders of Communism [Marx, Lenin, Engels, Stalin, and Trotsky] were seminary-trained. And, Cuba’s Castro was an Assembly of God minister until he joined the Cuban revolution. That says to me that, although they may have never been born again by the Spirit, they did not see in Christianity the answers to human misery that burdened them. Instead, they took the “quick and sure” way of Luke 4:6. Actually, that is the tragic and sure-fail way offered mankind in the Garden of Eden and continually since. Also, liberation theology, Jesus, and Christianity were used for personal adventures many other times in the past 2,000 years.

 Satan, the prince of this world, did not need to develop a new power source for liberation theology. He already possessed or influenced Christendom to a significant degree and civil government to a greater degree. Those two voices gave powerful aid and comfort to those who did not see the Lord as the solution to all problems. With minds fixed on solutions instead of ways, government and religion were blended. Of course, international communism was atheistic and used the fullest of state power. That was called totalitarian socialism [communism]. It murdered millions in the name of equality. Liberation theology behaved much the same under the name of the church.

1. You are aware, of course, that democratic socialism is a more benign form of Thought No. 32 on communism and liberation theology. It sees government as the solution to all problems, makes messianic-type promises, is a benevolent-sounding power movement, and fails to produce. The more it tries to undertake, the quicker it fails. Nations arrive at the terrible fix that we see having developed today in America and Europe.

 In much earlier years, physicians treated seriously ill patients by bleeding them. The sicker the patient, the more blood they [erroneously thought] needed to be removed. It is thought that George Washington died of this treatment, not of his pneumonia. All of that sounds nonsensical to us today, but that is exactly what socialism is doing to today’s free enterprise societies. They believe that regulation, redistribution, and central economic planning are the keys to unlocking growth and prosperity – but they are bleeding the life out of the patient. Their denial of the indispensible role of free enterprise to national prosperity has thrust America into economic uncertainty, damaging the engine of prosperity and undermining our liberties.

 How much further we must go, I don’t know. We may or may not turn to freedom and righteousness [the two must go together or you have neither]. The Lord has not backed down from the ways of freedom and righteousness, although the church and the world so commonly refuse them. We will see the time when such reign on earth in every area of life’s functions.

1. Although spiritual renewal is in its infancy here in Corpus Christi, I can already see that those of the renewal in the marketplace are translating religious words and life into the language and faithful worldview of the marketplace. That is where we are finding solid, theologically-minded leaders developing their thesaurus. They are translating their religious understandings and experiences into marketplace understanding, or perhaps more accurately, the reverse, as they catch the revelation.

 Indeed, the Lord has raised them up through His market classroom using Christian principles which over the years He ingrained in their souls to make them successful, reputable businessmen. Successful saints are found in abundance outside of traditional church settings, although religionists may have persuaded them to consider themselves worldly, carnal or non-spiritual.

 True religion is and should be found in abundance outside the meeting house of the church.

1. World War II was the most disastrous and largest war in human history. I say “human history” because it cannot compare to Satan’s rebellion when he was thrown out of heaven upon the earth, where he devastated it in his evil frustration. But, those wars [at least in their active, obvious manifestation] ended at some point and life settled into a routine, which became the ordinary way of life.

 However, in our life times we have been engaged in endless wars, meaning not the kinds that end. We have been in endless wars, on poverty and on drugs for examples. The persistence of a war environment [especially if it is costly and unending] wears us down so that we are willing to accept any plan and any person who promises to bring change, such as “peace.” We are willing to give up property and freedom in order to chase after “peace.”

 You know, as James Madison said, that because men are not angels, they need government, but that government must be controlled and limited for the same reason. We must not give unlimited power to those in civil authority.

 When the antichrist arrives he will promise peace and will deliver some of it, but at great price. I don’t expect to be here when that happens, but the spirit of antichrist has been in this world for millennia and will culminate in his personification.

1. The Lord is with you, and will be with you until the end of the age. Relax.