"Thanking God"

I will never forget hearing the testimonial from a survivor on the large screen at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum during my fifth grade trip to Washington, D.C. The impact that this man's quote had on me, a young Jewish boy, still remains even years later and will probably stay with me forever.

A man tells of watching another inmate in the camp praying.
"Why are you praying," he asks.
The man answers, "I am thanking God."
The first man is stunned. "For what could you be thanking God? What is there to thank God for in this hell?"
And the second man calmly responds, "I am thanking God that he did not make me like them."

What does this mean to me? It means that the second man doesn't see himself as someone who should be pitied. He actually considers himself lucky and blessed for the kind of person God created him to be. Even though Jews were being beaten, brutalized, starved and murdered at the hands of the Nazis, this man still believed that the Nazis were actually worse off than he was and they were the ones to be pitied for they had evil in their hearts. Even as he looked around at his people dying around him and struggling to survive in a situation whose outcome was bleak, he still found gratitude in knowing that he was a kind and humane being in this life. For that, as small as it may seem, he thanked God.

If this prisoner who had been demoralized, enslaved and robbed of his freedom could find something for which to be thankful and could still see something good in a terribly horrific situation, then I can always find the good and the positive in the course of the events in my life. This man's outlook will serve as a guide to my own outlook on life. The Nazis could take away the belongings, the freedoms and even the lives of so many Jews, but the Nazis could not steal who they were inside. To be able to hold your head high and to be at peace with who you are as a human being is truly what is important and is something that no one can take away from you.