

Thanksgiving 2020
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Thanksgiving Day is a uniquely American celebration. Its roots are deep in our rich history. It is that day each year when we recall how the pilgrims came to this country and how they gave thanks to God for guiding them safely to the New World and for their successful harvest.

The modern Thanksgiving holiday traces its origins from a 1621 celebration at the Plymouth Plantation, in Massachusetts, where these settlers held a harvest feast after their first harvest in the New World. They truly had a sense of God in their lives and they so desired to thank Him.

For sure, our world, a world suffering currently with a challenging pandemic, is radically different from that first Thanksgiving and that feast at the Plymouth colony in Massachusetts in 1621. For three days, they feasted on waterfowl and turkeys and thanked God for providing enough food for 13 Pilgrims and 90 Native Americans. And yet this American tradition of thanking God on this day continues with the same spirit of gratitude to God for the many gifts He has and continues to give our beloved Nation.

This legacy of thanks and the feast have survived the centuries, as the event became a national holiday in the United States 157 years ago (October 3, 1863) when President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday of November as a national day of thanksgiving. Later, President Franklin Roosevelt clarified that Thanksgiving should always be celebrated on the fourth Thursday of that month.

In the preface of today's Mass for Thanksgiving, and typically in all the prefaces (that prayer which begins the Eucharistic prayer of the Mass), we pray time and again the following familiar words: "It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord."

Did you every ponder that it is our "duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give (God) thanks?" And it is "right and just." We could not be at a better place than in this parish church this November morning, before our Thanksgiving dinners, especially on this national American day of Thanksgiving in this challenging year. It helps us remember that the object of our thanksgiving is always God Himself, through Jesus Christ our Lord. And as our psalmist today reminds us: "I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with all my heart, for you have heard the words of my mouth; in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise; I worship at your holy temple." (Psalm 138)

Today's scripture readings remind us so well that, despite different historical circumstances, the object of our thanksgiving as followers of Jesus is and has always been God, our God who loved us first and continues to love each and every one of us.

Like the Samaritan in this morning's gospel, he sets a good example for us to praise and thank God for His continued gifts and love, and in the Samaritan's case, his healing from leprosy. His example is even more compelling as he was the only one out of the ten lepers healed who returned to thank God and he was a foreigner as well.

For men and women of faith, for you and me, thanksgiving should be a way of life. In fact, thanksgiving is another name for Christianity. In the words of St. Paul, each of us should "give

thanks to our God always” for “the grace of God bestowed on [us] in Christ Jesus.” There is no greater grace than the life of Christ Jesus, a life each of us shares by virtue of our baptisms--His life, His joy. And as Pope Francis wrote in his memorable Apostolic Exhortation: “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.”

That is why we gather each and every day, and especially on Sunday (the Lord’s day), to celebrate the Eucharist, to “encounter” Jesus anew and with joy in our weekly family celebration of thanksgiving. From the Greek, the word Eucharist actually means thanksgiving. In fact, St. John Paul II once said that, “For us Christians, the Eucharist is the fullest expression of thanksgiving.” Every day is thus a thanksgiving feast around the altar as we pray at the preface of the Mass: “It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.”

I think you would agree with me that we try our very best at Mass to let God know how grateful we are. As the priest lifts the patten, we offer Him our very lives, in union with the eternal sacrifice of His Son on the cross. What more could we give Him? What greater act of thanksgiving could there possibly be?

There, we have finally thanked Him sufficiently (or so we think)...

...until (then) He turns around and gives His Son to us in Holy Communion! He did it again! We thank Him...He gives us even more! What an awesome, wonderful and truly great God we have. And we encounter Him, the Risen Jesus, each time we receive holy communion!

On this important national day, Thanksgiving Day 2020, we thank God in special fashion—around this holy altar at Little Flower-- for our Nation and the freedoms we share, especially our first freedom—our religious freedom—and for all the many blessings God continually gives us.

We pray for those who do not share fully in the bounty of this great and unique Nation, for our brothers and sisters, and especially this year, for our parishioners and friends, who may be suffering from the pandemic.

Moreover, we continue to praise God in gratitude by saying over and over again in a continuing spirit of Thanksgiving: “The earth has yielded its fruit; God, our God, has blessed us.”

Happy Thanksgiving to you all!