

Thanksgiving 2017

I History

The English Pilgrims at their Plymouth Foundation in the New World held the first Thanksgiving celebration in 1621, after their first harvest.

They invited some members of the native Wampanoag Indian Tribe, which had helped them survive their first year in the New World.

They thanked God for their many blessings in the New World, even in the midst of a very difficult first year as settlers in a strange land.

The Pilgrims did not celebrate Thanksgiving annually...

Just that first year.

Several presidents, including George Washington, made one-time Thanksgiving holidays...

George Washington proclaimed November 26, 1789, a national day of thanksgiving...

*... to recommend to the people of the United States a **Day of Publick Thanksgiving and Prayer**, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness...*

Abraham Lincoln issued a White House Proclamation on October 3, 1863, establishing the last Thursday of November as a National Day of

Thanksgiving,

thanking God for the many blessings our country has received, and fervently imploring "the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation", which at that time was engaged in the destructive Civil War, and to restore the nation to "peace, harmony, tranquility and union."

We have kept this tradition from 1863 to the present celebration of Thanksgiving, in this year of 2009.

II Are We Thankful... The Obstacles

The question is, of course, are we a thankful people?
Have you given thanks to God for your blessings today?
Did you say thank you to God for your blessings yesterday?
What were your blessings yesterday?
Many times we are not that thankful for our blessings.
Many times we don't even recognize our blessings each day.
Our hearts are so cluttered by other thoughts.
We have so many wants – stuff that we want.

In our cluttered, consumer society
where happiness and fulfillment is promised
if we purchase some new and improved, money back guaranteed, product...
We forget that happiness is an inside job,
that happiness resides within our hearts,
and that one of the key components of happiness is recognizing our
blessings and giving thanks for them.

III To Whom Do We Give Thanks?

Name me the five wealthiest people in the world.
Name me the five last Heismann Trophy winners.
Give me the names of the last five Miss America winners.

Now, think of a teacher whom you are thankful for.

Think of a friend who helped you through a difficult time.

Think of one or two people who made you feel appreciated and loved.

Who are the people we are thankful for?

Chances are they aren't the wealthiest, most famous, most credentialed people in the world.

Chances are they aren't celebrities.

But they cared for us and we are the better for this.

And for this we are thankful.

These people have blessed us. God has blessed us through them.

Are we aware of that?

Are we thankful for them?

Or are our hearts so cluttered that we are amnesiacs, hardly ever remembering to give thanks?

Story...

When I was working in New York I would spend Thanksgiving at my buddy's house in Queens, NYC. When it was meal time we would all gather around a table laden with turkey, stuffing, squash and sweet potatoes, vegetables, gravy, biscuits... I can still smell those delicious scents. I can still see all the desserts lined up on the kitchen counter, behind the table where we sat.

All of us, my buddy, his wife and his four young kids, would begin

Thanksgiving Dinner by holding hands and sharing one or two blessings during the past several months for which we wanted to thank God. Then my buddy Tony would say a prayer of Thanksgiving. What a beautiful way to begin our Thanksgiving Meal.

Another Thanksgiving Story...

Story... A Late Start

There was a wealthy couple in Dallas who have really struggled with teaching their children what it means to follow Jesus. Their kids had become

so accustomed to others meeting their needs that the idea of "serving" sounded like something from the Middle Ages... or Mars.

The father in that family realized he was getting a late start, but hey, it was better than no start at all!

A week or so before the holidays he said to his family, "We're going to do something different this Thanksgiving."

His teens sat up and listened. Usually when he said things like that it meant something exotic...like parasailing in the Bahamas.

But not this time. "We're going to go down to the mission and we're going to serve Thanksgiving dinner to some poor and homeless people."

"We're going to what?"

"Come on, dad, you're kidding... aren't you? Tell us you're kidding."

He wasn't. They went along with it because of his firm insistence, but no one was happy about it. For some reason their dad had "gotten weird" and apparently it was something he just had to get out of his system.

Serving at the mission what if their friends heard about it?

No one could have predicted what happened that day. Land no one in the family could remember when they had a better time together. They hustled around the kitchen, dished up turkey and dressing, sliced pumpkin pie and refilled countless coffee cups. They clowned around with little kids and listened to old folks tell stories of Thanksgiving long ago and far away. The dad in the family was thoroughly pleased (would you believe stunned?) by the way his kids responded. But nothing could have prepared him for their request a few weeks later.

"Dad... we want to go back to the mission and serve Christmas dinner!"

And they did. As the kids hoped, they met some of the same people they'd become acquainted with at Thanksgiving. One needy family in particular had been on their minds, and they all lit up when they saw them back in the chow line again. Since that time, the families have had several contacts. The pampered teens have rolled up their sleeves more than once to serve the family from one of Dallas's poorer neighborhoods.

There was a marked but subtle change in their how too. The kids didn't seem to be taking things for granted anymore. Their parents found them more serious... more responsible.

Yes, it was a late start. But it was a start.

Conclusion...

Thanksgiving...

A time to remember God's blessings to each one of us...

And God's greatest blessing, God's own son Jesus,

Jesus who walked among us, showering the people with love, healing and compassion...

Jesus who shows us the way of love, forgiveness and peace,

Jesus who gave his life for us so that we could live for him,

Jesus who continues to bless us with God's amazing grace...

We give thanks to Jesus on this day...

Sing Amazing Grace with me now.

Thank you Jesus... Thank you God.