



Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

Thanksgiving

The fourth Thursday in November, during which most Americans eat turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, and pumpkin pie, watch football or a movie and then take a nap, is a most enjoyable day to be with family and friends. This national holiday known as Thanksgiving actually has Catholic roots. A few key events in our country's early history provided the setting.

The Puritans who traveled from England and established a settlement in Plymouth in 1620 almost didn't survive the year. Roughly half the settlers died the first winter. Those that did make it did so through the grace of God and the help of a Native American named Squanto, who taught them how to hunt and fish and grow corn. It is quite amazing to realize that Squanto was a Roman Catholic! The story of how he encountered Christ is worth noting.

In 1614, Squanto had been captured by an English group led by Captain John Smith and taken on a ship to Spain where he was to be sold as a slave. Squanto was rescued by Dominican friars who instructed him in the Catholic faith. After requesting to be baptized and then receiving the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist, Squanto told the priests that he wanted to return to his people in America. They assisted him in finding passage to England, where he met John Slaney. Mr. Slaney taught Squanto English and arranged for him to get to Newfoundland off the east coast of Canada. Squanto served as an interpreter between the English and the Indians and crossed the Atlantic six times. Unfortunately, he was never able to return to his own tribe because they had been wiped out in a plague.

After Squanto came to the aid of the Plymouth settlers in 1620, helping them to grow their own food, he arranged for a harvest feast together with the local Wampanoag tribe. It was this harvest feast arranged by a Native American Catholic that is the basis of our day of thanksgiving. Ironically, the Wampanoag tribe later took Squanto hostage because they distrusted him, and he was rescued by the English.

About 170 years later, the first national observance occurred when President Washington, at the request of Congress, recommended Thursday, November 26, 1789, to the people of the United States "as a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God." This proclamation exhorted the people to "beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions, to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity

as He alone knows to be best." In 1863 Thanksgiving's status as a national holiday became official when President Lincoln made his first proclamation, naming the last Thursday of November as a day of national observance.

Since this national holiday is to be "a day of public thanksgiving and prayer," it is helpful to specify things for which we are grateful to God. In fact, I have found that naming five things each day in a simple prayer of thanksgiving leads to an ongoing attitude of gratitude and a better outlook to deal with the difficult parts of life. The list can include such things as:

- good health
- family and friends
- the grace to forgive
- delicious food
- the ability to walk (for which I am more appreciative as I recently sprained my ankle.)
- something going well at work or school
- God knowing us personally and loving us
- Being able to communicate with God through prayer
- Our baptism, when we became children of God and He begins to dwell within us
- Jesus giving His life for us on the Cross
- Being healed from ongoing habits of sin and their effects through the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The very best way to offer thanks to God is through the Holy Eucharist. The word Eucharist, from the Greek, means "thanksgiving." When the Holy Eucharist is celebrated, it is an action of thanksgiving to God for His works of **creating** everything out of nothing, **redeeming** us through the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, and **sanctifying** us in being cleansed, healed and strengthened through our cooperation with God's grace received in the Sacraments. Let us join the people in our parish community and attend Mass on our national day of Thanksgiving. Receiving Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and expressing gratitude to our Heavenly Father for all of His benefits will help us to keep the proper focus amidst family relations, good food and the other enjoyable activities of Thanksgiving Day.

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