

Thanksgiving Homily 2017 “Giving Thanks to God”

Fr. Frank Schuster

Every year, it is a tradition for the President of the United States to give a Thanksgiving proclamation. Since it is an American holiday, I have kept a tradition more often than not of reading the presidential proclamation at this mass. I have done so because these proclamations usually go ignored by the press, which is a shame. Regardless of where each of us stands politically, I was pleasantly surprised that that this year’s proclamation from President Trump was actually pretty good. And so, per my tradition, here is this year’s thanksgiving proclamation for your consideration.

“On Thanksgiving Day, as we have for nearly four centuries, Americans give thanks to Almighty God for our abundant blessings. We gather with the people we love to show gratitude for our freedom, for our friends and families, and for the prosperous Nation we call home.

“In July 1620, more than 100 Pilgrims boarded the Mayflower, fleeing religious persecution and seeking freedom and opportunity in a new and unfamiliar place. These dauntless souls arrived in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in the freezing cold of December 1620. They were greeted by sickness and severe weather, and quickly lost 46 of their fellow travelers. Those who endured the incredible hardship of their first year in America, however, had many reasons for gratitude. They had survived. They were free. And, with the help of the Wampanoag tribe, and a bountiful harvest, they were regaining their health and strength. In thanks to God for these blessings, the new governor of the Plymouth Colony, William Bradford, proclaimed a day of thanksgiving and gathered with the Wampanoag tribe for three days of celebration.

“For the next two centuries, many individual colonies and states, primarily in the Northeast, carried on the tradition of fall Thanksgiving festivities. But each state celebrated it on a different day, and sometime on an occasional basis. It was not until 1863 that the holiday was celebrated on one day, nationwide. In the aftermath of the Battle of Gettysburg, of one of the bloodiest battles of our Nation's Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed that the country would set aside one day to remember its many blessings. ‘In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity,’ President Lincoln proclaimed, we recall the ‘bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come.’ As President Lincoln recognized: ‘No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.’

“Today, we continue to celebrate Thanksgiving with a grateful and charitable spirit. When we open our hearts and extend our hands to those in need, we show humility for the bountiful gifts we have received. In the aftermath of a succession of tragedies that have stunned and shocked our Nation -- Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria; the wildfires that ravaged the West; and, the horrific acts of violence and terror in Las Vegas, New York City, and Sutherland Springs -- we have witnessed the generous nature of the American people. In the midst of heartache and turmoil, we are grateful for the swift action of the first responders, law enforcement personnel, military and medical professionals, volunteers, and everyday heroes who embodied our infinite capacity to extend compassion and humanity to our fellow man. As we mourn these painful events, we are ever confident that the perseverance and optimism of the American people will prevail.

“We can see, in the courageous Pilgrims who stood on Plymouth Rock in new land, the intrepidity that lies at the core of our American spirit. Just as the Pilgrims did, today Americans stand strong, willing to fight for their families and their futures, to uphold our values, and to confront any challenge.

“This Thanksgiving, in addition to rejoicing in precious time spent with loved ones, let us find ways to serve and encourage each other in both word and deed. We also offer a special word of thanks for the brave men and women of our Armed Forces, many of whom must celebrate this holiday separated from the ones for whom they are most thankful. As one people, we seek God's protection, guidance, and wisdom, as we stand humbled by the abundance of our great Nation and the blessings of freedom, family, and faith.

“NOW, THEREFORE, I, DONALD J. TRUMP, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim Thursday, November 23, 2017, as a National Day of Thanksgiving. I encourage all Americans to gather, in homes and places of worship, to offer a prayer of thanks to God for our many blessings.”

My friends, I always think a good question we can ask ourselves on Thanksgiving is who are we giving thanks to? Who do we thank for the blessings we received? It is good to remember that, as President Trump suggests, it is the tradition of our country that Thanksgiving is first and foremost about giving thanks to God.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus healed ten lepers when he journeyed through Samaria and Galilee. Nine lepers thanked themselves. One leper came back to give God the thanks. And he was the foreigner! This little fact was not lost on the listeners when the Gospel reading was proclaimed in ancient times. I think Jesus is also offering an invitation to us to be a little kinder to those around us in need.

My friends, it is very easy to spend this Holiday thanking ourselves for our blessings. As a people of faith, we know better. Today, we are invited to give thanks to God for our blessings and to be kinder to those in need in our community. Perhaps a good challenge for all of us is to begin our thanksgiving dinner with a prayer of thanksgiving to God, as the president rightly suggests, and to be more mindful of those who struggle to make ends meet. As both you and I know, there is so much in life that we can complain about. Today, let's count our blessings and give thanks to God from whom all blessings flow, through Christ our Lord. Amen.