

Thanksgiving “The Best Recipe”

Bishop Frank Schuster

Ah, here we are at last. Happy thanksgiving! Last year, it was difficult for most of my family to gather because of Omicron. The year before that Thanksgiving dinner was canceled for me altogether because of Covid 19. There was so much we all took for granted prior to the pandemic, don't you think? The thing I missed the most was family gatherings. When I was by myself a couple years ago, in a spirit of defiant joy I decided to cook a small turkey for myself even though I was on my own. I had never done that before and it was a terrible idea. It was more like jerky than turkey, but the experience made me smile on a day there wasn't much to smile about. This year, I am so looking forward to leaving the cooking to the professionals in my family. I will help however with the mashed potatoes. For me, this is accomplished by sprinkling a little potato dust over a pound of butter. Most of all, however, I am just looking forward to being with family. We are not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but we do enjoy each other's company. I wish that for everyone, although, I know that Thanksgiving dinner will be a challenge for a few families in our parish because they have suffered the loss of a loved one this past year or because relationships have become estranged. We are human beings, and we are sinners. We need each other desperately and we need Jesus most of all.

The reading from St. Paul this morning therefore offers us a very helpful reminder for any who are gathering in groups of family or friends tonight. Of all the recipes to be followed today, this is the most important recipe of all. This is what St. Paul suggests for us this evening, he says, “put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.” That is what he says. That's pretty good advice for Thanksgiving dinner, don't you think?

Of course, whenever Thanksgiving comes around, I always think it is good to remember who we are giving thanks to, wouldn't you say? Like I said, we take so much in life for granted and sometimes it is not until we are faced with an empty chair at the dinner table before we realize why giving thanks is important. For religious folks like us, Thanksgiving isn't about giving thanks to ourselves. That is a recipe for disaster. Thanksgiving is about giving thanks to God. Do not forget to thank God this evening, my friends. Do not forget to thank God...and the cook. It is bad luck to forget the cook.

As you know, every year, it is a tradition for the President of the United States to give a Thanksgiving proclamation. Guess who wrote the beginning of this one. I think it is especially appropriate this year. It begins.

“The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added which are of so extraordinary a nature that

they cannot fail to penetrate and so often even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.”

Thank you Abraham Lincoln! Consider that he wrote this during the Civil War. Talk about an awkward Thanksgiving! It is good to be reminded as faithful citizens that Thanksgiving for our forbearers was first and foremost about giving thanks to God for the blessings he has given our country, even during times of great hardship. It feels like our culture today has distanced itself from the original purpose of why we as a country celebrated thanksgiving, making the mistake of turning this holiday into a day when we thank ourselves and forget God altogether. Again, this is a recipe for disaster.

Our Gospel reading today accentuates this point, ten lepers were healed by Christ, nine of them thanked themselves, one returned to give thanks to Christ from whom all blessings flow. The one that returns to give thanks is the foreigner and I think this is an important point. How often it is that it is the foreigner or outsider who was invited into a family gathering that ends up being the most grateful for the invitation? Something to think about. Something to consider.

You see, my friends, this Gospel reading underscores the importance of gratitude in the spirit life. Gratitude is such at the heart of Christian living that even the word Eucharist comes from the Greek word meaning thanksgiving. At the heart of Christian worship is the heartfelt desire to be thankful to God and to each other; never taking anybody for granted, especially those who are closest to us. We would be remiss however if we didn't take time today to pray in thanksgiving for our public servants in our community who are working today on our behalf, police officers, fire fighters, health care workers, plumbers (as the case may be), the cashiers at the grocery store for when we forget something, or the pizza delivery guy if the oven breaks, the list goes on. There are so many to thank. We should be especially mindful and grateful to our men and women in uniform in our community, country and throughout the world, who can't be home this year for Thanksgiving because they are out there in harms' way to keep us safe. It is also an important time to remember the grieving, the lonely, the hungry and the poor that they may receive our love and support. My friends, on Thanksgiving, we remember one basic life lesson and it is this. God does not owe us anything and yet he gives us everything, especially his Son Jesus Christ. Thanksgiving is therefore a time to invite God into our homes this evening and give Him thanks for every blessing he gives us, our families, and our nation, through Christ our Lord. Amen.