

I have deeply mixed feelings about Thanksgiving. On the one hand I understand that the practice of gratitude of setting aside time – hopefully more than just one day a year – to give thanks to God, and to each other, has biblical warrant, and long human tradition in almost any culture you care to name. I have deeply fond person memories of gatherings of family and friends as a child and as an adult and I enjoy the traditions that my family has created, although the turkey trot this morning was a little wet. On the other hand, the schmaltzy pastiche that we have plastered on Thanksgiving in the U.S., with the pilgrims and the Indians, I find nauseating, and quite frankly abhorrent. The story we tell ourselves leaves out nearly 400 years of genocide, the fact that the pilgrims were Puritan religious fundamentalists who held thanksgivings subsequent to the first one after the slaughter of native men women and children,<sup>1</sup> and who subjugated native people into slavery, sowing the seeds for the roots of the African slave trade.<sup>2</sup> I cannot unsee that and, from time to time, it puts me off the cranberry sauce.

When George Washington declared the first National Thanksgiving day, he was not thinking about Pilgrims, Puritans, or the Pequot Nation. Washington said, in signing a the executive order for the first Thanksgiving day in 1789, that it was our duty to acknowledge, “that great and glorious being, who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, and that will be.” Both to Washington and to Congress, at the end of a protracted struggle with the British empire, having found some measure of tranquility it was time to be thankful, to acknowledge

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<sup>1</sup> The 1637 Thanksgiving in Connecticut occurred after Puritan settlers massacred nearly 700 men, women, and children of the Pequot nation as they gathered for a harvest festival. Subsequent thanksgiving feasts were declared after successful attacks on other native nations, including the Wampanoag, the nation who had saved the first Puritans in Plymouth by providing them food during the winter.

<sup>2</sup> It was common practice in New England in the second half of the 17th Century to sell Native people into slavery in the Carolinas. This practice became so lucrative for some New Englanders, that, when the supply of Native people ran short because of disease and genocide, they looked to the west coast of Africa as a more plentiful, if not quite so convenient source of slaves.

that they had won through the difficulties, and and had come out the other side, changed, but hopefully not diminished.

Washington continued though, also reminding the nation that there was more to this day than what we had won. We ought, he said, “beseech [the Great Lord and Ruler of Nations] to pardon our national and other transgressions; to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties.” That is not something we normally hear, or frankly, are prepared for in the middle of the pumpkin pie and shrill ads cajoling us to by more things in a few hours time. But, maybe to you, and to me, and to Mr. Washington who was a life long Anglican/Episcopalian, it makes perfect sense - after all the prayerbook has always called the eucharist the Great Thanksgiving.

Perhaps it is the most fitting template that, as I think our first President suggested, we model our day set aside for giving thanks on the sacrament of the Eucharist, that time where, every week, and in some places everyday people gather to give thanks to God for the goodness and love which has been made known to us, not only but singularly in the life death and resurrection of Jesus. Just as many people do on Thanksgiving day, we give thanks for this and all other blessings during the eucharist, and prepare ourselves, by reading from scripture about all that we have to be thankful for, we name our gratitudes and hopes in the prayers, and then, just as mr. Washington suggests, we confess our sins and reconcile ourselves both with God and, in the peace, with each other, so that in our feasting on the communion of the risen Christ, we may become one body and one spirit. There is one thing that maybe is lacking in our Thanksgiving celebration each year, though, one addition that we could learn from our Sacramental practice.

During the post communion we pray, “Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart.” Every time, after we’ve been fed and given thanks and been reconciled we acknowledge that there is work still to do, and that the only way that it’s going to get done is if we go at and perform our several and relative duties that we have as a part of that work with gladness and singleness of heart.

That’s what Jesus wants the crowd to understand in today’s gospel reading. God’s gift of sustaining is not given so that we can do what we want, but in order for us to do the work that we have been given, the work of co creating, of preaching of being the transformed people of God in the Body of Christ. So today, on the day we sat aside for thanks, it’s also a good time to ask ourselves, what is our part of that work? In my house we’ve been talking a lot about Standing Rock and the ongoing prayer camp and demonstrations. We’ve decided to donate to their defense fund, and later this week, I’ll be boxing up an almost new down coat, and some other clothes that I don't really need in the PNW and mailing it to people who do need it to stay warm as they continue to work toward the protection of sacred sites and clean water from the continuation of 4 centuries of trauma. There is much to be thankful for today but there is also much work to be done. May God continue to bless us with a rich bounty that we might go out into the world to do that work given to us, that at length we might all give thanks at the wedding feast of the Lamb in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Amen.