

## **“A TURKEY OF A THANKSGIVING”: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON GRATITUDE**

This is unlike any Thanksgiving I can remember, or just about almost like any other. **Thanksgiving of 2005** is right up there for a “bummer” of a holiday. I had recently embarked upon graduate studies in Rome. Roman classes begin in October and one of my courses was a condensed mini-course. Due to it being taught by a visiting Jesuit professor from Spain, it met twice as often but for half the number of weeks. All was going swimmingly well until the day that I discovered my **final oral exam** was scheduled for Thanksgiving Day. What? I have to take an oral exam on **Thanksgiving Day**. Typical response of an American studying abroad— the prof had no knowledge of this holiday— why should he? And the New York Macy’s Day Parade? **Fu-ge-da-boud-it!** Entitled, “Philosophical Presuppositions of Trinitarian Theology in the Church Fathers,” the course was tough enough stuff in my native language, much less in a foreign one.

To add insult to injury, while we were permitted to take our exams in our native tongue, I discovered the very kindly Jesuit did not speak any English. I was not even remotely fluent after having arrived in Italy in September. Not only did I **somehow manage to survive** the exam, he was graciously benevolent in his grading of my answers. My pre-rehearsed memorized lines in pigeon Italian got me through it, though I missed a lavish Thanksgiving Dinner hosted by the North American College, the seminary for Americans in Rome. Neither pumpkin pie, nor cranberry sauce graced my plate that day. It was a **strange holiday** to be sure, almost as if it never happened. Perhaps that is how **you felt** this past Thursday. If so, you are hardly alone. Many people would just as soon forget and move on, looking forward to Christmas.

But I would like to remind you that **this Thanksgiving**, while quite different from others we recall, is probably much more akin the **first Thanksgiving** than you might imagine. Recall, after a more than two-month voyage, the Mayflower landed on **November 11, 1620** at the tip of **Cape Cod** at what is now Provincetown, Massachusetts. They made their way to Plymouth Harbor the following month, landing on December 16, 1620. Much of what we know today comes from a single letter written in December 1621 by Edward Winslow. Just over 50 colonists (half of them children) attended the feast, which actually ran three days and included games and military exercises. There was tremendous **hardship** on the voyage and very few women survived. A ravaging disease spread throughout the colony— more than 7 out of every 10 women perished during the first winter alone.

At its core, the “Thanksgiving” was literally just that— a thanks offered to almighty God for still being alive! Historians surmise that the colonists **may have** eaten wild turkey, though that is by no means certain. Most likely, they feasted on venison and shellfish, augmented by “cabbage, carrot, cucumbers, leeks, lettuce, parsnips, pumpkins,” according to research specialist Tom Begley of Plimoth Plantation. The English Puritans suffered so much hardship, and yet stopped to **count their blessings** and therein set an example for generations to come. The **attitude and demeanor** that we bring to these days between Thanksgiving and Christmas, remains critical. Guard against the malaise that too often sets in when people experience a natural let down from their **heightened expectations** of a joyous season.

As I receive e-mail notifications of the cancellation of various events that I have traditionally enjoyed this time of year, I am faced with a choice. I can **grow in resentment** or I can embrace the uniqueness of what remains in my life. And what exactly is it that remains? Hopefully, we have remained **connected with our family** and our faith. Ironically, I have spent more time with family thanks to a free computer Bridge game website, complete with video chat. Why not use **technology**? While visiting my mother, I could send a text to my brothers bearing a single word “Bridge?” Receiving an affirmative reply, in an instant we can connect and whittle away a half-hour and enjoy one another’s company. And yes, I lose, and lose a lot!

This is no substitute for an in-person gathering, and I appreciate that. However, these and other options are worth considering, as they provide a human face to our relationships. Though assuredly this will be a much different Thanksgiving weekend than in the past, I urge you in these next several weeks of our Minnesota “Dial -back” to be creative and resourceful. Be patient with one another, be mindful of those who are alone.

But by all means, do not **crawl into a shell**. Pick up the phone to call someone; send an e-mail, initiate a Zoom meeting and stay connected. Most importantly, spend a greater amount of time with the Lord in reading and prayer, and be attentive to those in your household.

- Good news is good news, so I won't complain. While there are numerous reasons– not all of them positive–the **divorce rate** in the U.S. has hit a **50-year low**. For every 1,000 marriages in the last year, 15 ended in divorce. Indeed, that is most certainly due in part to far fewer Americans getting married today. For every 1,000 unmarried adults in 2019, only 33 got married. It was 35 in 2010 and 86 per 1,000 in 1970. May more young adults see the **wisdom** in reaping the many **benefits** associated with marriage.
- Please pray for all people who work in the hospitality industry, most especially restaurants. I encourage you to patronize your favorite restaurants by **ordering take-out**. It is a great way to continue to support them. They are suffering through no fault of their own– we can do our part to keep our local economy going.
- I drove across the newly constructed bridge on **Summit Ave**. When turning left to go to the grocery store at Syndicate, it was obvious that the **left-hand turn lane** disappeared, replaced by an extremely wide median. A little research revealed that an underground filtration system for rainwater runoff is beneath it. Now, I have nothing against water filtration, but it is a pain to **halt traffic** behind you while simply trying to buy some milk. But I had this sinking feeling that cars almost seem an afterthought on Saint Paul's most famous street.
- We are preparing a **parish mailing** that will include information about **Christmas Masses** and confessions. Please keep the parish website handy, as we will update it with any additional information. These days I am learning to be flexible. What else can we do?
- Old habits are hard to break. But with this one, please try! Today, we resume **distribution** of Holy Communion at the usual time. That means you will **return to your pews** for the final prayers and announcements. **Don't head right for the exits!** After Mass, please exit beginning from the sections closest to the doors, with those in the center sections waiting in order to avoid congestion at the exits. Thanks for your cooperation.
- Have no fear–our **Schola will return** at the 10:00 a.m. Mass. We are being cautious during the dial back period, as State of MN social distancing guidelines for singers has been adjusted slightly.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector