

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
Thanksgiving Day  
November 24, 2022  
rmcneely+

Now, thank we all our God,  
With heart and hand and voices

There was a man who found the barn  
In which Satan stored his seeds  
That were ready to be sown in the human heart.  
Satan found that the seeds of discouragement  
Were more numerous than the others.  
And he had learned from experience  
That he could make the seeds of discouragement  
grow almost anywhere.

The man examined the devil further  
and Satan had to reluctantly admit  
That there was one place in which he could never  
Get those seeds to thrive.

“And where is that?” the examiner asked.

Satan replied:

“In the heart of a thankful person”

Too bad the University of California at Davis  
Psyche department didn't know that story.  
They could have saved a lot of time and money.  
Instead, they conducted research on human subjects  
And concluded  
That people who described themselves as being “thankful”  
Were 23% less likely to develop depression and despondency  
Than those who did not.

How many of our atheist and secularist friends suffer  
At this time of the year  
Deprived by their socio-political prejudices  
Of the sheer joy and pleasure  
Of giving thanks to God.

Instead, they spend this day in a hedonistic wasteland  
Of shopping malls  
Heeding the materialistic call  
In the frenzy of greed competing for parking places  
Space at the bargain table  
And the attention of the sales clerk.  
The dread of the family dinner table.

They must stand gape looking at the Christians  
On their knees in church returning thanks to God  
For the blessings of their lives.  
Yet here we are in this oasis of God's Love  
Devoting this hour to God  
To the recognition that all we have is of Him.  
That the manifold blessings of this life  
are a gift from God.

On the other hand, it is easy for any of us  
to fall into the abyss of the darkness of our lives.  
When the tragedies seem overwhelming  
When we cannot see the hope  
The joy

This day dedicated to Thanksgiving is the antidote to that darkness  
When we focus on all the aspects of our lives  
For which we are grateful  
And there is a whole new outlook.

The clergy are not immune to the despondency of our calling.  
 We spend too much time in hospitals

    Too much time hearing confessions and in counseling  
     And not enough in baptisms and weddings.

A priest friend of mine has a habit that we might all consider.

He bought a book of blank pages

    At least 365 pages in fact.

    And each day before retiring,

    He records on the page of the day

    at least one instance of something from the day

    For which he is thankful.

Often little things

    A stranger offers a courtesy

        Opening a door

        Offering a greeting—good morning

    A motorist gives him the right of way

    The barista offers a smile at his favorite coffee house

    A songbird sings out on a spring morning

    An email from an old friend

    The progress of the Fall colors

        displayed in a row of street trees

    The Blessing of a new day.

His book is filled with such things.

I know my good wife would enter in her Thanksgiving Book

    My attempts at small home repair jobs, because

    I usually make them big enough to call in the professionals

She would include thanks for the bath tub

    The one place the family allows her some time to herself.

For gardening,

    Because it's a relief to deal with dirt outside the house.

For the children who put away their things

    and clean up after themselves

    They're such a joy

    You hate to see them go home to their own parent

For the teenagers

Who give their parents and grandparents  
an opportunity to learn a new language .

In my book would be smoke detectors

To tell me when the turkey I am roasting is done.

As I said it is not easy to fill the book in the dark times.

But this very day was born in the darkest of times.

You know the story of the Pilgrims of Plymouth Bay.

Their tragedy

The deaths they suffered

On their Atlantic voyage that took almost 3 times

What they had planned

Their hunger and thirst

Before landing in the wrong place two months into

A bitter winter,

At Plymouth instead of Virginia

The disease that took their little ones and the elderly

The deaths of almost half of their number

By the time of their first harvest.

Yet, foremost in their minds 401 years ago almost to this day

They gathered together in thanksgiving to God.

Or the case of an embattled President of these United States

Having suffered the greatest loss of life

in our Nations history

Wrote to the people of the Nation

Encouraging them to give thanks to God

For what remained.

“The year that is drawing towards its close

has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields

and healthful skies.

To those bounties which are so constantly enjoyed  
 that we are prone to forget the source from which they come,  
 others have been added,  
 which are so extraordinary a nature  
 that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften  
 even the heart which is habitually insensible  
 to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God. . . .

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.

It has seemed to me  
 fit and proper  
 that they should be solemnly,  
 reverently  
 and gratefully acknowledged  
 as with one heart and one voice  
 by the whole American People.

I do therefore invite my fellow citizens  
 in every part of the United States . . .  
 to set apart and observe  
 the last Thursday of November next  
 as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise  
 to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. . . .”

That embattled President was Abraham Lincoln.

His Nation was torn apart in bloody civil war  
 He had lost his son  
 He was known to wander the White House at night weeping.

Yet, he found it in his heart to proclaim a day of Thanksgiving to God.

I would love to know what he would have written in a daily Thanksgiving Book.

So even in the depths of loss and despair and disconsolation  
 These people have shown us the way.

There are no doubt entries in Father's Thanksgiving book that are well beyond the little things.

Entries of huge, life altering events for which to be thankful.

I know of a story coming out of France during the Second World War. It was 1944:

A platoon sergeant, Yankee Div, Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.

Received a letter from home

From his mother.

And in it she happened to ask an odd question:

"What were you doing on Thanksgiving Day?"

He knew exactly what he was doing that day.

He and his men had been assigned a dangerous mission

At dawn, he was to take his men to a critical road intersection

Where an enemy strongpoint was suspected

He would tell you that the normal procedure, the "book"

Was to fan his men into the cover of a stand of trees

And move on the intersection under the cover they provided.

But, before deploying his platoon,

For reasons he cannot explain

He stopped, stark still and argued with himself

about what to do.

And after a time, he violated procedure

And ordered his men down a road

in the middle of the open plane

No shots were fired. No one injured.  
 When they got to the intersection  
     they found that the enemy had escaped in the night.

As they turned to go back to their lines  
 the sergeant thought he saw something in the tree line.  
 He halted his men and cautiously investigated  
 On the back of the trees, where neither he nor his men would ever  
 have seen it;

    There were signs written in German.  
     Which read: "Minen". Mines.  
     Signs warning the German troops that the stand of trees  
     Had been littered with mines.  
 Had he not made that change to orders, to the "Book"  
     He and his men would have been blown to bits.

When he wrote his mother of his Thanksgiving Day he asked her  
 why she had asked him that unusual question (What were you  
 doing on Thanksgiving Day?).  
 She later replied that on Thanksgiving Day she had a strong feeling  
 that he was in danger. When she opened her Bible it fell to II  
 Chronicles 20:17 and she had read:

"...stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord... fear not, nor  
 be dismayed ... for the Lord shall be with you."

Both mother and son had a great deal to be Thankful for a year  
 later when they were reunited at war's end.

So if you were to begin a Thanksgiving Book  
     What would write in it  
     On this Thanksgiving Day?