



Immaculate Conception  
Church

## Homily for Thanksgiving

Year A 2014

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On November 18th of this year the New York Times carried an article entitled “United States of Thanksgiving.” The article hoped to answer a simple question: What does each state contribute to this great National Celebration that we call Thanksgiving? For each state a recipe was given that represented the custom of the State. Rhode Island contributed Indian Pudding. As I read the article I wondered what each person in our parish contributed to our Thanksgiving Celebration. How did each person in our parish make Thanksgiving a unique experience and not just a casual day off. Perhaps all these questions boiled down to one thought: How is your life going these days? How many things are you grateful for? Or, how many things are you suffering through? Does life feel oppressive? Are you worried about family problems, personal difficulties, expenses that you can’t meet? What is going on within your heart that is causing you ache, concern and worry? Tell me, is this a good year to give thanks – or would you prefer that it just go away and come back another day, another time, another year? What is it that we bring to Thanksgiving?

I share this with you because we are often victims of our feelings. It is easy to be grateful when the weather is nice, the blessings are obvious and everything seems to be going perfectly. It wasn’t that way for our pilgrim parents. In the humbling experience of their hardship, in the midst of their own individual and collective pain, they were able to not only realize what they had taken for granted in the past but also what profound mercy from God was theirs in the present. It was this spirit of gratitude in the midst of suffering which motivated our ancestors who celebrated that first Thanksgiving.

The Word of God today would call us to that same spirit of Thanksgiving. The Word of God would help us understand what each one of us brings to Thanksgiving in this year 2014. It would remind us to be like Solomon and be humble before the richness of God in our lives. It would entreat us to be like St. Paul and have gratitude for the gift not only of each other but all those who have loved us and given us the gift of themselves. And like the singular leper who returned to give thanks, we should never forget that God has given us all that we are and all that we have. And it is to God that we owe the most profound sense of gratitude. We whose lives are filled with more blessings than we could ever realize need to take heed of God’s word and of the example of our pilgrim ancestors.



In the late 1700s Benjamin Franklin was invited to preach a Thanksgiving Day Sermon. His words were brief and his thoughts profound. I have always loved this sermon and, as always, I end my sermon tonight by sharing it with you. Benjamin Franklin preached:

"Who is rich? He that is happy with what he has.  
A home, a wife, children,  
these are the great gifts of life.  
Wealth is not his that has it, but his that enjoys it.  
He who is content has enough, and he that complains has too much.  
Having been poor is no shame, but being ashamed of it, is.  
You are only poor when you want more than you have.  
Enjoy the present hour,  
be mindful of the past,  
and neither fear nor wish the approaches of the future.  
If you would have guests, be happy with them, and be happy yourself.

Nothing dries sooner than a tear.  
A long life may not be good enough,  
but a good life is long enough.  
Wish not so much to live long, as to live well.  
Great beauty, great strength, and great riches  
are really and truly of no great use:  
a good heart stands above all.

Proportion your charity to the strength of your wealth,  
or God will proportion your wealth to the weakness of your  
charity.  
To bear other people's afflictions, everyone has courage and enough to spare.

People who are wrapped up in themselves make small packages."

May the God of all grace bless us this Thanksgiving. May we come to this Feast of Thanksgiving with a spirit of profound gratitude...for our joys, our struggles, for all that makes us who we are. For in all things God stands by us and for this we should always be ready to say two simple words: Thank you.