

**Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis**  
**Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 22, 2018**

The Old Testament Book of Sirach proclaims: "...bless the God of all, who has done wondrous things on earth." Thanksgiving is the day we Americans recall all the wondrous things God has done for us as a nation. The United States is a good country, where in our over 240 years of nationhood God has blessed us with natural bounty and the creative genius of our people, a people literally drawn from all over the earth.

Ever since the Pilgrims settled in America in the 1600s – various colonies on and off would celebrate a day of Thanksgiving. After George Washington proclaimed a day for Thanksgiving in 1789, asking all to give gratitude to God for the new nation, a Thanksgiving Day became an annual national event, though when the holiday was observed varied. It was Abraham Lincoln in 1863 that set the national day of Thanksgiving on the last Thursday of November. Even in the midst of the most tragic war America has ever experienced. President Lincoln felt we had much to be thankful for as a people, and that we should take nothing for granted. Franklin Roosevelt made Thanksgiving Day on the fourth Thursday of November, whether it was the last Thursday or not.

In our two hundred and forty year history, as a nation, we Americans have experienced recessions, depressions and the blight of dust bowls on our farms. But also looking over our two hundred and forty years, it is true we have come through these difficult times – a more bountiful and blessed nation. While we have certainly had our struggles, our ethnic battles, racial prejudice, and even wholesale slaughter of Native American tribes – it is precisely because we are an eclectic blend of peoples from all over the world that makes us such a resourceful and productive nation.

Thus, our strength as a people is rooted in our being a nation of blended cultures, ethnic groups and races. Our diversity through many trials and tribulations has made our demographic ideals more deeply rooted throughout our land, and has made the civil rights of all more deeply cherished than ever before. Yes – we as a nation have much to be grateful for.

Our hearts should be full of gratitude not only for how God has blessed us as a nation with bounty and liberty, but as Christians we should be grateful that God himself is our Savior through Jesus Christ and has given us hope for eternal life. Paul the Apostle reminds us that God in "Christ Jesus" has enriched us in every way. We are not lacking in any spiritual gift and God will keep us firm "to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Part of the problem, I believe, in being a truly thankful people is that many of us have become oblivious to what this great feast of Thanksgiving is all about. We get lost in all the commercial hype that's been going on as soon as Halloween is over with, and get caught up in Black Friday sales promotions. Thanksgiving just becomes a kick start to the Christmas season, where our goal is to see who can get the shopping mall's doors first to get the best deals. As we gorge ourselves on food, we forget what we should be thankful for, and who we should be thankful to. We even forget how to offer thanks!!!

*OVER*

In our Gospel passage from Luke, Jesus heals ten lepers, but only one of the healed lepers bothers to return to Jesus, thanking God for the gift he has been granted. Jesus asks: "Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine?" Indeed, where are the other nine? My friends, it is Thanksgiving Day! So, on this Thanksgiving Day 2018, let's take to heart Sirach's admonition to "bless the Lord of all, who has done wondrous things on earth." As we sit down at our tables to celebrate today – our tables heavily laden with turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie – let us recall the favors and glorious deeds of the Lord for us; from the gift of our nation to the gift of our faith in Jesus Christ we hold so dear. Let us recall, remember and give thanks!

May God bless you, your families and your friends with a wonderful Thanksgiving and may God bless you with the bounty of His love through Jesus Christ who gives us really true wealth – eternal life.

#### TOP TEN HISTORICAL THANKSGIVING FACTS – Did you Know?

1. Thanksgiving Day is celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November in the USA.
2. Thanksgiving Day is celebrated on the second Monday in October in Canada.
3. The Plymouth Pilgrims were the first to celebrate the Thanksgiving.
4. They celebrated the first Thanksgiving Day in the fall of 1621.
5. The Wampanoag Indians were the people who taught the Pilgrims how to cultivate the land.
6. The Pilgrim leader, Governor William Bradford, had organized the first Thanksgiving feast in the year 1621 and invited the neighboring Wampanoag Indians also to the feast.
7. The state of New York officially made Thanksgiving Day an annual custom in 1871.
8. The annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade tradition began in the 1920s.
9. Californians are the largest consumers of turkey in the USA.
10. By the fall of 1621, only half of the pilgrims who had sailed on the Mayflower survived. The survivors, thankful to be alive, decided to hold a thanksgiving feast.