

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We gather tonight to give thanks and praise to the Lord for all He has provided for us. And tomorrow we will gather in our homes around a meal to celebrate once again, with a feast...a gathering, a celebration similar to that first feast when the Wampanoag people and English colonists of Plymouth, Massachusetts...known as Pilgrims, shared a feast together in 1621. Some of you may know this and some may not however, this so-called first Thanksgiving was not one big meal but actually a three-day festival of hunting, eating, and other entertainment in honor of the Pilgrims first successful harvest.

This Thanksgiving or this November celebration was not celebrated again until George Washington would announce the first National Thanksgiving Holiday that took place on Thursday November 26, 1789. But Thanksgiving would not become an annual tradition until the 19th century. This is when an American writer by the name of Sarah Josepha Hale (known for the nursery rhyme Mary Had A Little Lamb) was inspired by a diary of Pilgrim Life to recreate that first Thanksgiving feast. Beginning in 1827 Hale launched into a thirty-year campaign to make Thanksgiving a national holiday. Then in 1863 in the midst of the Civil War, then president Abraham Lincoln announced that the nation would celebrate Thanksgiving every year on the final Thursday of November. But then in 1939 President Franklin Roosevelt moved the holiday up a week to give Depression Era retailers an opportunity to make more money during the Christmas shopping season. He was widely criticized and in 1941 FDR signed a bill fixing Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of November where it remains today.

Our psalm prayer appointed for this evening reminds us that God our Father has created us as His own and that He sustains us by His hand. We then prayerfully beseech God our Father to help us always to give thanks to Him. So, in light of our prayer and this very American holiday I am going to do something different, I would like to take a moment and invite us to share what we have been thankful for and what this day means for you...I will conclude with some reflections.

(Congregation were asked to share what they were thankful for)

We have all been blessed with so much in this great nation we are privileged to live in but as we take time to be thankful for all we are given, may we also be thankful for the promise that gathers us together...a promise made known to us in a meal...not of turkey and all the trimmings, but a lowly, simple,...holy meal consisting of a piece of bread and sip of wine...nothing like the meal that we will gather around tomorrow. Nonetheless, Jesus reminds us in our appointed Gospel for tonight:

“Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

And tonight, may our response be like that of the disciples when they said to him:

³⁴ ... “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Jesus then reminds them and us: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” May we give thanks not just tomorrow

but may we give thanks always to the Lord because his mercy is not just everlasting, God's mercy extends beyond our comprehension...beyond our compassion and even beyond our animosity.

What's more, our Lord's mercy is not just upon us who have gathered here, His mercy is upon all of us...and that mercy endures from age to age. Our Thanksgiving meal tomorrow will gather family and friends, but that meal will perish but we will not...because we have been fed the true Thanksgiving Meal in our Holy Eucharist that is the bread from heaven...a Holy Meal that gathers us, centers us, and assures us that we will never be hungry, and we will never be thirsty. We are fed the bread of life and we drink from the cup of salvation, which comes down from heaven and gives grace and life to the world. And in this Holy Meal is the promise...a promise that is the paradise of new life. So, as we gather this night and as we gather tomorrow may we continue to rejoice in the Lord always not just in prayer and supplication for *our* loved ones but for all who like each one of us are in need of God's grace and love. May we remember and be thankful that through Jesus Christ we are all assured of that promise of forgiveness and life.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.