

Giving Thanks for the People at Our Table

One of my favorite holidays of the year is Thanksgiving.

We have a morning Mass, and then typically later in the day I'll get together with loved ones for a meal.

The dinner is always great; white and dark meat, some rolls, mashed potatoes and gravy, corn and green beans and perhaps some macaroni and cheese on the side as well. And often a great dessert. Good stuff indeed!

However as we all know the past few years have been challenging. This year we are pretty much back to "normal," and hopefully holiday celebrations will be smooth and wonderful for people, and the days of using "Zoom" or online communication at Thanksgiving and Christmas are behind us. Instead hopefully this will be a Thanksgiving of conversations, of football, of laughs, of good food, and families spending time together, and perhaps getting together again on Friday for some leftover turkey.

Hopefully it's a great time for you and your loved ones, but as we celebrate this year, I think it's worth thinking about how important the people are we break bread with, and how we can give thanks for them (and even try to look in a positive way on those with whom it may be a little challenging to get together with).

For one, give thanks for the family. This past year, as my dad had a bit of a health scare with a triple bypass (and is now thankfully doing much better), I'm thankful not just for seeing him and mom on Thanksgiving, but being able to frequently visit and spend time with them, whether we're having meal, playing a game of cribbage, or just having a conversation. I view every day of life we are given as a gift, and it can't be overstated how important it is to make the most of the time we have together. Never overlook how meaningful the little things are we do for one another and the simple moments that we share.

Second, let us remember life is eternal. We all have people we wish were seated with us at the dinner table. We may not be able to physically spend time with them as we once did, but they live on forever in the love of God, praying for us as we pray for them. And we can look back at all they showed us, and continue to learn from them to put into practice the many good things they showed us.

Third, we can strive to forgive and recognize that we are all flawed. Hopefully one of the things we've learned through the pandemic is that grudges and animosity just aren't worth it, for we are only here a little while. Maybe this Thanksgiving you'll see some people who aren't atop your Christmas list. Or maybe you are fed up with someone in the family over their politics, especially after election season. Perhaps there's something that you need to let go of. We do not just overlook the past or ignore faults; for we believe that helping people make better choices is a work of mercy, but so too is bearing wrongs patiently. Hopefully we can strive to help our relationships grow through

working through our feelings, being honest with others about our concerns, and learning how to let go of grudges, and also working on patience.

Lastly, never forget what a gift you are to the people around your dinner table. I often will share with children who are preparing for First Communion that the Eucharist fills our spirits; it is a meal, but I often compare it to Thanksgiving in that we share a meal, but our souls are filled with the love and joy of people; of a hug, a conversation, and seeing the people who mean so much to us; it truly lifts the soul. So too, do you. So when giving thanks, be thankful for the gift of life and never take it for granted.

Here's hoping you and your loved ones have a wonderful Thanksgiving with some great food, memories made, and great time spent being with one another. May the food fill your belly, and the love fill your soul.

God's blessings to you and your loved ones, and Happy Thanksgiving!

Fr. Paul