

## **LET'S PUT THANKS INTO THANKSGIVING**

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Psalm 100

The real meaning of many of our American Holy days has become obscured by the passing years.

In fact, I have often wondered what sort of impression a visitor, say from Burma, would have of the meaning of Easter, or Christmas, or even Thanksgiving for that matter, by simply observing the apparent disregard, at least on the surface, of anything sacred or religious in our celebrations.

What we once set apart as Holy Days have become holidays.

And now, it is really appalling to see how few of our citizens know the deeper meaning of these festival days of the church.

A few years ago, Hans Stalder, who at the time was my Father's assistant in the Open Door Mission and since has become his successor, was engaged in some last minute shopping for Christmas. He stopped at one of the main intersections of Oakland, California where Dad's Mission is located and was attracted by the strains of "Oh Little Town of Bethlehem" coming from the Christmas window of one of the department stores. He stopped for a moment and was enjoying the beautiful scene of the Christ child nestled in the stable with Mary and Joseph lovingly standing over Him.

All of a sudden, a reasonably well-dressed woman pushed her way through the crowd and, with genuine irritation, said: “For goodness sakes, do they have to put religion into Christmas, too!!”

I suppose we're shocked at the unutterable stupidity of the woman.

“Do they have to put religion into Christmas, too?”

We wonder how anyone in this so-called Christian nation could ever reach maturity without knowing the real meaning of this Holy Day which is second only to Easter in its religious meaning.

But what of us?

As we approach this Thanksgiving time, how many of us do it with any real sense of gratitude beyond a casual “Thank Goodness!!” that the pressing bills are paid, the baby's not sick, and we've got an invitation out to dinner so “I won't have to fix the turkey.”

Really now, how many of us have stopped to Put Some Thanks Into Our Thanksgiving? It's not that we are ungrateful. That would be an unfair accusation. It's simply that we have learned to live by a set of ideas which make Thanksgiving difficult, if not unreasonable.

Even without knowing it, we have adopted certain generally accepted ideas which make it much more reasonable not to be thankful. Let me show you what I mean. One of the common ideas by which we live is that

### **We Are Independent People.**

We can, and do, take care of ourselves. This is one of the things for which we are justly proud. We are people of achievement. No longer do we need to depend upon the goodness of nature to supply material with which to feed, clothe and house ourselves.

Now we need only to step into the laboratory and presto!—we can create  
our own cloth out of new synthetics,

our own food in the form of high-potency pills,  
make our own homes out of amazing new plastics.

I read the other day where, within a few short years, atomic energy will make it possible to heat the runways of our airports. Heat rising from these huge stretches of concrete will dispel fog and cloud formations. No pilot will need to make a blind landing again. The sky above the airport will be clear to at least 1,000'.

Truly, the accomplishments of mankind are outstanding! Through the grace of our laboratories, we are independent people. For that reason, it seems hardly necessary to give “thanks” for what we have, for we would simply be thanking ourselves. A second idea is that --

### **WE ARE SELF-MADE PEOPLE.**

Or, at least, we can be if we want to be. We live by the belief that anyone can do or be what he or she wants to if there is a willingness to pay the price. The clue is determination. In fact, our Secretary of Defense got his neck into a sling when he said he always preferred bird dogs to kennel dogs. He was simply saying what we all know to be true: if one is willing to work, it is possible, in our free enterprise, to get ahead. Because we are self-made people, the blame or thanks for what we are belongs to us. A third idea which is common today is that --

### **We Own What We Have Because We Earned It.**

We didn't use any subterfuge.

We didn't exercise political patronage.

No one left us a legacy.

What we possess is ours because we earned it by the sweat of our brow.

And because we earned what we have, it is ours to do with as we please.

No one handed it to us on a silver platter, so why be thankful? We would only be thanking ourselves! Do you see what I mean? The ideas by which we live simply are not conducive to thanksgiving. Another is that

**We Are Self-sufficient.**

We have knowledge.

We have morals.

We have a code of ethics by which we live.

We are law-abiding citizens.

We do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

What's all the fuss about being grateful for a decent city in which to live, or a pleasant place in which to work?

If we don't live like savages, it is because we planned it that way. And, if the rest of the world would follow our lead, they'd be better off, too!

There are many other ideas similar to these which could illustrate what I mean about it being hard for Americans to be thankful. Let me give two more.

**We Can Save Ourselves**

The pilgrims were always talking about being saved from hell. Well, we've taken care of that problem by the neat process of ruling hell out of our theologies. Since we no longer believe in hell, we don't need to be saved from it.

Our great military power has made us safe from other nations.

Our vast farms have saved us from any shortage of food.

Our Social Security has saved us from the fear of old age.

Our educational system has saved us from ignorance and superstition.

So when we talk about being saved, it is not surprising that the average American answers:

“What do you mean? Saved from what and by whom? We can save ourselves, thank you!”

We are independent people. We are self-made people. We own what we have because we earned

it. We are self-sufficient. We can save ourselves. So it naturally follows that --

### **We Are Complete.**

Or, at least so nearly so it's only a matter of time until we are. These are the ideas by which we live today. They are as different from the ideas of the Pilgrims as night is from day. That's why the Pilgrims found it easy to be thankful, while we find it hard.

It's not that we are ungrateful, thoughtless people. Rather, it is because we *are* thoughtful people. These ideas which have been advanced simply makes Thanksgiving unthinkable.

Therefore, the Holy Day in it's traditional sense of humility and gratitude to God, has given way to a holiday of football games, turkey shoots and bulging tummies!

That is, it is doomed to such a fate unless we wake up and realize the ideas by which we live are false!

Let's look again at our text. With bold incisiveness the Psalmist makes a fatal thrust at each of the false ideas by which we live, such as the notion that we are independent people. To this, the Psalmist answers:

“Know ye that the Lord He is God” (Psalm 100:3a).

For our 20th century trinity of mechanism, humanism and materialism, the Psalmist offers the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

He reminds us of the fact that all of our great achievements are built upon the foundation stone of others.

He reminds us that our nation, perhaps more so than any other nation on earth, is dependent upon the brotherhood of nations for security and prosperity.

Economically, we are most dependent of all, because we have so much more to lose.

The Psalmist calls to our remembrance the fact that this mighty trinity that we have worshiped: mechanism, humanism and materialism is impotent without the vast, natural resources placed here by our Heavenly Father.

He stabs us into the awareness that all of our penance performed before the altar of our modern idols will be to no avail in time of drought, flood and storm, for when all is said and done,

“The Lord He is God”

and **we are dependent upon Him**.

Take the idea that we are self-made people. To this, the Psalmist answers: “It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (Psalm 100:3b). What miserable people we become when we find no other end in life but ourselves. How sad our lot when we come to the place of wanting to thank someone, only to discover we have no one to thank.

I'm sure we have all met the self-made man who worships his creator. But every time I meet such a one, I feel a tinge of pity, for the fellow is cutting himself off from any possible self-expansion.

A lake which has no outlet for the waters that pour into it becomes,  
in every sense, a dead sea.

Likewise, the person who proudly claims all credit for his or her success is doomed to be a dead soul for that person is short-cutting the power that makes us grow.

“It is He that hath made us and not we ourselves” (Psalm 100:3b).

The Psalmist is driving home the fact that what we are, we are by the grace of God.

The hands with which we build,  
the feet with which we climb,  
the mind with which we think and dream  
are all gifts from the unlimited goodness of God.

“It is He that hath made us and not we ourselves” (Psalm 100:3b).

A reminder that we are not self-made people.

And then the Psalmist deals a fatal blow to the false assumption that what we have is ours because we earned it when he says --

“We are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (Psalm 100:3c).

Have you ever studied the complete dependence and helplessness of sheep? Of all God's creatures, it seems they are most in need of tender, watchful care.

Unable to protect themselves, they need a shepherd.

Unable to fight and kill for their food, they must have a pasture.

How strange that the Psalmist should liken us to sheep, and yet, how true the likeness.

Often we have cried out from the depth of our despair:

“Savior like a shepherd lead us,  
Much we need thy tender care.  
Precious Lord and only Savior,  
All our needs thy fold prepares.”

Have you ever stopped to marvel at the balance of God's design and nature? The very air we breathe and the water we drink—alter their chemical construction even slightly and this planet would be as lifeless as the moon.

The scripture drives home the fact that “This is Our Father's world” and we are, as it were, intruders if we thanklessly think that what we have is ours because we earned it.

The strength we have. The health we enjoy. The courage that makes us winners. All are but blades of grass from our Father's pasture. We are not owners. We are stewards of God's wealth and treasure. **What we have is not ours to keep. It is ours to share!**

And then we come to that final triad of false ideas by which we live. We are self-sufficient. We

can save ourselves. And we are complete.

To this our scriptures answer: “For the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endureth to all generations” (Psalm 100:5). What is the Psalmist saying? He is telling us there is none good save God. That that which we call righteousness is as filthy rags. That with all our moral achievements we are still lost without a Savior.

Just as an aviator must draw upon his oxygen supply when he flies into high altitude, so too must we draw upon the gracious goodness and everlasting mercy of God expressed in Christ if we are to rise above our frail efforts to lift ourselves into the realm of real salvation. Only then are we complete. We were made by God and we can find no rest until we find our rest in Him. If for no other reason than this, we are not complete without Christ, for it is only when He comes in that we have Someone to whom we can give our thanks.

How truly, then, has the Psalmist spoken. How directly has he gone to the center of our need. For the greatest of all life's virtues is gratitude. And how miserable our state when we want to give thanks only to discover that, beyond ourselves, we have no one to thank! So --

Let's Put Thanks Into Our Thanksgiving.

Let's put aside the false ideas by which people live today.

Let's join with thankful hearts in gratitude to God for His merciful kindness.

Let's make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

Let's serve the Lord with gladness.

Let's come before his presence with singing.

Let's know in our hearts of hearts that --

“The Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; for we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. And the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting: and his truth endureth to all generations” (Psalm 100).