

From the November 4, 2010 Issue

Giving Thanks as a Christian

Thanksgiving may seem like one of the most clearly Christian holidays on the American calendar. Compared to the consumerism of Christmas and the candy of Easter, at least with Thanksgiving, the giving of thanks is still involved. We need to give thanks, to recognize that the blessings we enjoy are not our own doing. We cannot honestly take the credit for most of the good we experience and participate in, and we must realize that there is credit to be given whenever we experience grace. We have a real, deep need to acknowledge that and to give gratitude. The act of thanksgiving centers us, stabilizes us, and reinforces the truth of our place of dependence in this universe.

The Universality of Thanksgiving

The Thanksgiving holiday challenges all of us to reflect on the blessings we enjoy and to express gratitude. Of course, it's also about turkey and football and department store parades, too; but it is still good to give thanks, and it's good for all of us. In a certain sense, there's nothing particularly Christian about Thanksgiving. Take any religiously-minded person, and the idea of Thanksgiving won't seem foreign to him. The god or gods he is thanking may not be the God we thank, but he may be able to participate with a similar sense of gratitude. Even a person who isn't spiritually minded at all may reflect on the fact that he is the beneficiary of good luck or good fortune or a good family... or he may simply give thanks to the cook for a turkey that isn't too dry.

This Thanksgiving, take time to give thanks for all these things: for the community you live in, for the turkey on the table, for the roof over your head.

Give thanks. But decide to **give thanks as a Christian.**

Giving Thanks for Relationship

At your Thanksgiving table, enjoy the turkey, mashed potatoes, sweet potato pie, whatever it is you have at your table. And while turkey is one of the great blessings of Thanksgiving, most of us realize that at its best, Thanksgiving is about a lot more than just turkey. Even turkey with mashed potatoes and sweet potato pie!

When we as Christians give thanks to our God, we are not just giving thanks to the Source of all blessings. We are giving thanks to a God who knows us and who shares his life with us in a personal way. When we give thanks, we are thanking the One “from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name” (Ephesians 3:15). When Christians give thanks, we are giving thanks to a God who is fundamentally about face-to-face relationship; not just the God who came up with the idea of this world and spoke the word and made it happen; not just the God who came up with the idea of you or me and waved a wand and POOF-ed us into existence; and not even just the God who invented turkey. We give thanks to the one true God who is (and always has been) all about person-to-person relationships.

We give thanks to a God who is not a simple individual, but a community. He is the Trinity—one God who is Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. In our God the sharing of life and love has always been who he is, and out of that he shares his life with us. Out of his energy and intellect and self-

giving, he gave us the possibility and the reality of life and breath; because of him we have minds and hearts and strength. He shares in all our joys and all our pains. And out of his incredible affection and care for us, in Jesus he shares in our human life willingly and graciously.

God honors our personhood. You and I are not just pieces of the created universe. It isn't as if, from God's perspective, there's this classification called "Humanity" and we're just random, unremarkable examples of it. God likes us and our uniqueness. He likes variety! He likes the interactivity, the give-and-take that happens when people come together. Paul speaks directly to this divine privilege of personhood and relationship.

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. ~ 1 Timothy 2:1, NLT

This Thanksgiving, **give thanks as a Christian.**

If you're with your family, give thanks for your family as a whole, but give thanks for each member, individually, personally, as an individual gift of presence, in themselves a blessing! God decided to bring that person into the world—different and special, just as he brought you into the world, with your unique laugh and walk and way of being you.

If your past has been painful, allow God to see through the pain and past the pain even if the pain is all you yourself can see. Give thanks, not because you have experienced life with your family as an unmitigated blessing, but because you are a Christian! "Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them" because each of us stands in the same place before God, not on the basis of our own goodness or graciousness but only because of God's grace.

Give thanks for those who couldn't be with you, for those who wouldn't be with you. Maybe right there, at the table, or one on one. Maybe in your conversation with others. Maybe privately, between you and God.

Even if you are not at the point where you can see each person as a blessing, choose to see each person as someone who needs blessing. They need all the same blessings you need; and all the nastiness and trouble that has become evident in their lives and in their relationships with you and the people you love may just be a judgment that they need Jesus, and they need for God's will "that everyone be saved and understand the truth" to become known as real in their life. Choose to trust God's wisdom in making that person and bringing him into your life. Trust God's control of your future, and of theirs, and give up trust in yourself. Give up the idea that you really see things as they truly are.

Give Thanks for Redemption

For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity – the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time. ~ 1 Timothy 2:6

Giving thanks as a Christian means that we recognize all of this as Good News. But now we come to the crux of the matter. Your Thanksgiving crowd may know the Word and spontaneously break into praise of God and what he has done. Thanksgiving may be a time of true worship. Not all

of our families have been on the same journey, though, and some of those we love may be deaf to what God has been speaking to us over the years.

Still, as Christians, we have to give thanks for redemption and for reconciliation, because if we know the truth, we know how much we have been set free. Our relationship with God—and if you want to think of it this way, our relationship with the source of all goodness and all life—has been healed and made right. Know that Jesus has bought your freedom, *our* freedom. Know that redemption is a reality! Know that—as we're going to sing in a few weeks—God and sinners are reconciled. All those people we find it difficult to give thanks for, all of those people who seem miserable and intent on making us miserable... It's a lot easier to give thanks for them when we know that their freedom has been paid for! Their reconciliation has been accomplished!

Just as God has given you and me freedom and has brought us into his life, the truth is that in his relationship with the rest of the people in our world, God is not captive to their attitudes, their anger, their blindness and their resentments! We may find them difficult to be around, but God has always chosen to be around them—and having been there, and having known them as they are, in Jesus God has given his life so they may live in him.

This year, have a wonderful Trinitarian Thanksgiving!

~ *Matt Royal*