

## CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)  
Week of 23 November, 2008

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:  
Hard to believe that Thanksgiving is so close.  
Here are some thoughts you might find helpful as you celebrate.

Glorious God!  
How curious that we should set aside  
only one day a year  
and call it "Thanksgiving".

Holy Friend!  
I offer you praise and thanks  
for EVERY day,  
for ALL times and places in my life.

I breathe, and it is Your breath that fills me.  
I look, and it is by Your light that I see.  
I move, and it is Your energy moving in me.  
I listen, and even the stones speak of You.  
I touch, and You are between finger and skin.  
I think, and the thoughts are sparks of Your truth.  
I love, and the throb is Your presence.  
I laugh, and it is the rustle of Your passing.  
I weep, and it is Your Spirit brooding over me.  
I long, and it is the tug of Your Kingdom.

For my life, for those who walk with me,  
for words and music and worship,  
for the world,  
and for the One who promised me a Kingdom,  
I pause this day to say my thanks.  
Amen!

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving Break.  
We all need it.  
Just don't forget God.

## THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

CADET THANKSGIVING MASS  
The annual CADET THANKSGIVING MASS will be  
held next Tuesday, 25 November, at 1900 at the

Chapel. And you're all invited to stay afterward and share in some Thanksgiving pie...with the pies provided by the Parish.

**FROM A CADET:**

The following thoughts were sent to me by a cadet in 1997. As you'll see, he wrote them after the Corps Thanksgiving Dinner that year. He made some good points, and I thought I'd share them:

Today is Thursday, and the Corps had mandatory dinner tonight. At the end of the meal, I sat alone at a table in the Mess Hall, allowing a fairly random train of thoughts to run through my head. During the meal, I had listened to a teammate of mine talk about how much he hates all of the things he has to put up with as a plebe. It occurred to me that many cadets never stop to take the time to appreciate the incredible gifts that have been given to them. I thought about all of the people in the world who would give almost anything to have the opportunity to have what I have. I looked down at the empty plate in front of me and realized that I had completely taken for granted the fact that I never have to worry about where my next meal is coming from. I then looked around the Mess Hall and thought about all of the great men who passed through this place to go on and fight for their country. I then thought of the suffering that Jesus went through in the name of mankind. The suffering that I have to deal with in my cadet life is so insignificant when compared to this. It almost seems absurd that we would complain about the way in which we are treated in the face of the great blessing that has been conferred upon us. I wish I could say that I take time every day to thank God for all that I have, but I don't. I think it's time to change that. I wish every cadet would do the same. Being here is one of the greatest opportunities that I could imagine having, and all too often we take it for granted. I only hope that I have the strength to always do what is right with the gifts that I have been given.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**THANKSGIVING:**

Our celebration of THANKSGIVING is "made in the USA", and it isn't part of the Catholic Church's church-wide liturgical calendar.

We all know the story: the English Pilgrims (who had spent 12 years in Holland to escape persecution for their religious beliefs) arrived in Patuxet (later called Plymouth) in

Massachusetts on 11 November, 1620. In their first year, a bitter winter and poor diet took the lives of 47 out of the 100 Mayflower voyagers.

In the fall of 1621, even though the harvest was meager, the Pilgrims decided to have a “thanksgiving” holiday. The local Native-American chief, Massasoit – chief of the Wampanoags – attended, along with 90 of his braves.

The day was spent in competition – games and marksmanship – and the banquet consisted of venison, duck, goose, seafood, eels, white bread, corn bread, leeks, watercress, greens, desserts made from wild plums and berries, and wine. Turkey does not seem to have been on the original menu.

The charter of the Pilgrims called for a “day of thanksgiving” on the anniversary of their arrival, and over the following years, they sporadically observed the practice (for example, two years later, they observed a “Thanksgiving Day” on 20 July, 1623, to thank God for much-needed rain).

After that, the custom spread slowly to other colonies, and the day was observed around whatever day in the fall saw the harvest of crops.

In 1789, George Washington decreed a day of “national thanksgiving” (26 November of that year), but the practice was again sporadic until Abraham Lincoln ordered that the final Thursday of each November be observed as a day of praise and thanks to a gracious Heavenly father.

Finally, in 1941, Congress passed legislation that the fourth Thursday of each November be observed as “Thanksgiving Day” and as a national holiday.

But all of this has its roots – as you may suspect - in the Jewish and Christian traditions of Western Civilization, as well as in the practices of Native Americans.

Jewish religious traditions had both public and private thanksgiving sacrifices, some of which are detailed in the Hebrew Scriptures. The fifty days before Pentecost (in the spring) were a seven-week thanksgiving festival called “Shavuot” (Feast of Weeks), and there was another feast in the fall called “Sukkot” (Feast of Booths).

And the thanksgiving theme was and is very prominent in Christianity. The word chosen to describe the bread-and-cup memorial ritual of Jesus’ resurrection and continuing presence was called “eucharist” (Greek for “thanksgiving”).

The Aztecs celebrated the corn harvest by beheading a young girl, who represented Xilonen, goddess of new corn. It seemed that the Pawnees also sacrificed a young girl. The Cherokees danced the Green Corn dance and began their new year at the end of the harvest.

While Roman Catholic tradition has never had a universal “thanksgiving day” in its liturgy, most countries of Europe had some kind of thanksgiving celebration, and it was often kept in the fall during the harvest time. For example, the feast of Mary’s Assumption was kept in Hungary as a “thanksgiving day”, and England, Germany, France and Holland kept 11 November (St. Martin’s Day) as a kind of “thanksgiving festival”.

In the USA, the day is kept primarily as a family celebration, which usually contains some kind of “table grace”. Many churches have a special kind of “thanksgiving service” which is ecumenical in nature, demonstrating that the whole theme of “thanksgiving” is a natural part of the human spirit, arising naturally from the instincts of the heart.

## GOT A QUESTION?

Q: If God knows everything, why should we pray for our needs?

A: We pray for our needs because we need to...not because God doesn't know our needs. God is continually inviting us to accept his gifts and his love, but we often fail to recognize it. Through prayer, we grow increasingly conscious of his care for us, and we learn to respond to his invitation.

We begin to see our dependence and draw closer to him.

Our prayer shows us where we stand before God.

If we simply ask for things in prayer, then we are childishly trying to use God as a slot machine...but if we share our life, our feelings and our experiences with him, we are setting the scene for a deep relationship based on a loving trust.

In such a relationship, there is no need for a "request list". It's replaced by the confidence that our Father knows what's best for us. He anticipates our prayer and takes it into account. He knows our hearts, and he can unite his gifts with our real needs.

As Mother Teresa of Calcutta said: "Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God's gift of himself".

And St. Augustine made this observation: "We don't pray in order to inform God; we pray in order to transform self".

## THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

### THE "HAIL, MARY":

This brief prayer – which Catholics learn early in life, along with the "Our Father" – provides some thoughts on the fact that Mary of Nazareth has played a big role in Church-belief from earliest times.

It's sometimes called "The Angelic Salutation" – from the fact that the first part of the prayer is the greeting of the Angel Gabriel to Mary in the first part of Luke's Gospel (1:28):

Hail, Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with you.

And the next line is taken from roughly the same place. After she agrees to be the mother of Jesus, Mary goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who says to her (Luke 1:42):

Blessed are you among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

One can find indications that these two sentences were combined into one prayer as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century. A final sentence was sometimes added:

Because you have conceived Christ,  
the redeemer of our souls.

Several ancient rituals – the "Liturgy of St. James" (celebrated in Antioch), the "Liturgy of St. Mark" (from Alexandria in Egypt), the "Ethiopic of the Twelve Apostles" (source of early Christian worship in Ethiopia) – contain this prayer in honor of Mary. So does the "Ritual of Severus of Antioch", who died in AD 538.

So it seems clear that the Early Church valued these Scriptural words and used them to honor Mary, the Mother of God.

The prayer is also found in liturgical books from Rome in the 600s and was used at several times in the liturgical year: the Feast of the Annunciation in March, for example, and parts of Advent right before Christmas.

Even though it was found consistently in those liturgies of the early centuries, it didn't become a "household prayer" until the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It was at that time that local churches in Europe incorporated it into "popular" devotion. For example, in 1198, Bishop Odo of Ciliac prescribed that members of the church there learn the "Hail Mary", along with the "Our Father" and the Creed by heart.

The second part of the prayer appeared much later. Since the first part (above) is really two simple salutations, it was felt that there should be an actual petition. So by the 1400s and 1500s, the second familiar part was added:

Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death.

#### UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"You ask me how I can remain calm  
And not become upset when those around me  
Are all bustling about.  
What can I say to you?  
I did not come into the world to agitate it.  
Is it not sufficiently agitated already.

St. Francis de Sales  
(d. 1622)

And that's the way it is, a day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our time...

and YOU ARE THERE!!

Best wishes for the weekend.  
Relax a bit, if possible;  
get some sleep...  
and remember:  
you're always a part  
of my prayers.

Woodie