

His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco: Thanksgiving Reflection 2020



Brothers and sisters in the Lord,

In the Psalms we read, "***Give thanks to You, O God; we give thanks; we call on Your name, and recount Your wondrous deeds.***" (Psalm 75:1). As we prepare to celebrate our national Day of Thanksgiving, each of us should remember and bow our heads in thanks to Almighty God for all that we have in our lives.

American tradition says that the Pilgrims celebrated the first Thanksgiving celebration in November 1621 to observe their first year in the New World. The Pilgrims were deeply religious and knew that their very survival had been because of the grace of God. Their lives were meager and the conditions were hard. In that very first year more than half of their company had died. So, after a successful harvest in the fall of 1621, there was much to be thankful for, especially after so much hardship. And as the pious people they were, they gave thanks to God Almighty who had led them through the hardships and provided for them.

By almost any measure, 2020 has been a hard year for us all. We have all been affected one way or another. There has been a tremendous loss of life due to the pandemic, both in the United States and throughout the world. There has been great economic hardship affecting millions of people. Here on the west coast there

have been the devastating fires, which threatened so many and so much. There has been social unrest and anxiety.

But it was the mighty hand of God that has led us through these months and we must offer our thanks to Him because we still have much to be thankful for. In our personal lives, we have more today than our forebears could ever have imagined. God continues to bless us with our Orthodox Faith, which fills us with spiritual strength. We should be thankful for the generosity and optimism of the people of our Church, distinctively American traits, as they respond to the needs of our Archdiocese and the signs of new growth taking root. As we read in the Epistle of James (1:17), and we hear in the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, "**Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights.**" Thanksgiving and gratitude are at the core of our being as Orthodox Christians. Saint Paul writes, "**give thanks in all circumstances**" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). When the spirit of thanksgiving fills our hearts, we cannot help but be filled with joy. Negativity and cynicism are incompatible with the spirit of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving celebrations will be very different for most of us this year because of the pandemic. Many of us will not be able to travel to be with family and friends. We have been encouraged to have smaller gatherings. This year, the table will need to be set in new ways, perhaps with a video camera at one side to connect virtually with family and friends. Yet, the spirit of Thanksgiving will still be present.

The needs of those less fortunate among us will still be there - for them the hardships never seem to end — providing us with an opportunity to share from our bounties. Thanksgiving Day is a reminder of our need to thank Almighty God for His bountiful gifts in words of prayer, but also with deeds and actions that extend God's blessings on all.

Beloved in the Lord, on November 30, just a few days after our Thanksgiving celebration, our Church will commemorate the Feast of Saint Andrew the first-called apostle of the Lord. The Feast of Saint Andrew is the Patronal Feast of the Ecumenical Patriarchate because tradition teaches us that Saint Andrew established the first Christian community in the city of Byzantium, later renamed Constantinople. Our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew is the 270th Ecumenical Patriarch, and I ask all of you to remember him fervently in your prayers, asking the Lord to grant him many years, "**rightly teaching the word of truth**" in all he does. The ministry of His All-Holiness is to lead us as our shepherd, caring for the whole flock, guiding protecting it so that none of the sheep are lost. We look to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the person of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew as the focal point of our unity as a Church, as he draws us closer to

Christ and to one another. The Feast of Saint Andrew is also a significant day of greetings and exchanges between the Roman Catholic Church and our Orthodox Church because of the fraternal relationship between Saint Peter and Saint Andrew, who were brothers. It is significant that our two Churches had brothers as their foundations. While we are still separated from Holy Communion from one another, these fraternal greetings should remind us that we are brothers and sisters in the Lord.

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, on this Thanksgiving Day, bow your heads before Almighty God and offer thanks to Him. Thank Him for bringing you to this day in health and well-being. Thank Him for the blessings of family and friends.

May the Lord bless you and keep you always! A blessed Thanksgiving Day to you all!

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