24/11/2021

Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco – Reflection for Thanksgiving 2021



Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

In the document, For the Life of the World, issued by His All-Holiness our Ecumenical Patriarch we read, “Without thanksgiving we are not truly human. This, in fact, is the very foundation of the Church’s Eucharistic understanding of itself and of its mission in the world. When humanity is in harmony with all of creation, this thanksgiving comes effortlessly and naturally.” (For the Life of the World, §74).

Reflecting on this statement in these days before we celebrate Thanksgiving, I realize that we have much to do to cultivate a deeper sense of gratitude for all that Almighty God provides for us. As we pray daily in Vespers, all created beings, “look to You, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.” (Psalm 103:27-28). We must confess that our sense of entitlement and expectation has grown out of control. In our rush to consume, we can easily forget the interconnection and interdependence we have to one another and to the created world.

Thanksgiving Day is our national opportunity to pause and reflect, even as we

enjoy a beautiful feast with family and friends. For many of us, this year's celebration will be more joyous as we continue to emerge from the pandemic. More of us will travel and our gatherings will be larger than last year. It has taken patience, perseverance, and prayer, but what a blessing it is to see families and friends re-unite in fellowship, and especially on this day to give thanks.

Our reflection should lead us to new and renewed acts of thanksgiving. We have been blessed by Almighty God with an abundance of material goods. Yet, there are still many around us who have not been so richly blessed. They are our neighbors, and, as we have learned from the parable of the Good Samaritan, we must show mercy on our neighbor, no matter who they are (Luke 10:25-37). We must not allow ourselves to be disconnected from the poor and the neglected in our society. As Saint Clement of Rome wrote in the first century, "Let the strong take care of the weak… Let the rich man minister to the poor man." Our parishes, our Metropolises, and our Archdiocese have increasingly created the means for us to serve and to support our neighbor. When we are thankful for all that we have, our natural inclination should be to share our blessings with others in acts of charity and philanthropy.

Cultivating gratitude in our lives and the lives of our children should be a daily activity, not just a ritual of the Thanksgiving Day table. Each day, we can take a few minutes to praise God and thank Him for the day and all that we receive from Him, from our friends and families, to the material goods that nourish us, and the beauty of God's creation which surrounds us. As the Psalm verse (103:2) in the first antiphon cries out, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

My beloved sisters and brothers in the Lord, when you gather with family and friends, give thanks to Almighty God for the bounty that He has blessed us with, for "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights…" (James 1:17a)

Wishing you and all of your loved ones a most blessed Thanksgiving and may God bless you and everyone!

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