

Thanksgiving Reflection 2022



Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

There is a beautiful saying that circulates on social media: “When you have more than you need, build a bigger table, not a higher fence.” This saying is especially appropriate for the Thanksgiving holiday in our nation because it expresses the deeply Orthodox Christian value of hospitality. Hospitality, or philoxenia, is encountered in the Book of Genesis (Genesis 18), when three strangers appear at the tent of Abraham. Abraham not only welcomes them into his tent, his home, but provides an entire banquet for them. As the Bible says, he orders that his servants make bread for the visitors, and then offers an entire meal for them. A detail in the text states that the ingredients for the meal are the best Abraham could offer.

Abraham’s actions are those of “building a bigger table,” out of the abundance of his goods, and not unnecessarily protecting them with a higher fence. And as we know from the story, the three visitors are a revelation of the Holy Trinity, who because of Abraham’s generosity – philoxenia – promise that he will become the father of a great nation.

Our Thanksgiving celebrations are opportunities to build a bigger table and share

our abundance with others. Indeed, we will create the best meals we can from the best ingredients we can obtain, pour the best wine, and offer wonderful desserts. Yes, it can be a day of over indulgence, but this is meant to be a sign of our prosperity over the year, one that is graciously shared without hesitation with family and friends.

In the Gospel reading this year for the Sunday before Thanksgiving we heard the parable of the rich fool who planned to tear down his barns and store all his wealth. The Lord makes this point about hoarding wealth by saying, "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God." (Luke 12:21). Saint Cyril of Alexandria writes about this passage, "Who is (rich toward God)? Evidently, one who does not love wealth but rather loves virtue, and to whom few things are sufficient. It is one whose hand is open to the needs of the poor, comforting the sorrows of those in poverty according to his means and the utmost of his power." (On Luke, Homily 89). The Lord is making the point that we are meant to share our abundance; we are meant to build a bigger table, and not a higher fence.

So we must reflect on this day of Thanksgiving as we share so joyfully, as we open our homes to our guests. How might the virtues of hospitality and sharing penetrate all the other days of the year? How might we hand on these virtues to the next generation? How will they continue our traditions? As we read in the book of Deuteronomy, "Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise up." (Deuteronomy 11:19). In short, we must continually make the effort to hand over these virtues, through our words but even more so importantly our example.

Our greatest act of offering thanks to God on this holiday is to make a commitment to become more willing to share our abundance with others and to activate that commitment in meaningful and substantive ways, from charitable giving to service to others. We have been blessed by Almighty God to live in the most prosperous land and era in history, even considering the economic and social challenges of the last few years. We must bow our heads in thanks to Him for His benevolence towards us. As we hear daily in the Psalm of Vespers, "when you open your hand, they are filled with good things." (Psalm 103/104:28).

My beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, look at your holiday table, consider how its abundance can be shared with others, not just on this beautiful Thanksgiving Day, but every day of the year.

Wishing you a most Blessed and Happy Thanksgiving to you and your family!

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