

The first Thanksgiving Day celebrated in North America was in 1621. The Pilgrims of Massachusetts were not accustomed to festivity, yet they decided to host a banquet in order to share their harvest with the Native Indians who had taught them and helped them grow food in the new land. They celebrated with games and contests, and then a dinner of fish, venison, turkey, corn, and other vegetables, and berries.

In 1789, after his inauguration, President George Washington proclaimed a national day of thanksgiving for our new country. For many years after that, each state chose its own day to celebrate. In 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the fourth Thursday of November as the official Thanksgiving Day of the nation. He said: *"The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and heartful skies. These bounties are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come. I do, therefore, invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November as a Day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our benevolent God who dwells in the heavens".*

In recent years, many Americans have celebrated Thanksgiving Day by helping out at the local soup kitchen or food bank, or serving meals at a homeless shelter.

Here at St. Rita's, we continue to assist the poor, especially poor families with young children who are in need of food, through our monthly "Food Drop Off" weekends, organized by our St. Vincent

de Paul Society. We also maintain a food bank for the poor. Likewise, we maintain our Guatemala Mission Project.

These are gestures of service and selflessness, personal acknowledgements of the abundance so many of us enjoy. But it is also a way of recalibrating gratitude, a reminder of the stark edges of American prosperity, and the suddenness with which life can veer off course.

Feelings are mixed at the end of a day like that—the well-being of good service, the relief of re-entering your own life, but perhaps above all, a sense of humility, as Pope Francis reminds us.

We are all feeling some of that this Thanksgiving, here in a world of very different expectations.

Tempering our prosperity these past pandemic years, does not need to mean tempering our thanks. If anything, the thanks we give today may feel a little sharpened. These times should bind us together in celebration and in service—not to lament what so many of us have lost, but to acknowledge how much we have, and to accept the responsibility for sharing it.

In this Thanksgiving, there is also a real joy in looking ahead to a more honest but more hopeful account of who we are and what we expect of ourselves as a nation. We can be forgiven for feeling as if we've just woken up back in hard times, but with a restored sense of reality and affection and self-recognition.

Challenging times will not bring us together, in-and-of-themselves. But our response to them may. This is a nation, and we are a Church, eager to be called to service and selflessness and humility; to be able to give thanks again for who we really are, for our better selves, as well as for the riches we enjoy.

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