

Sunday, November 20, 2016
EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

Thanksgiving

Even though it may be only one day, without Thanksgiving we might not recognize all the things we normally take for granted. The gift of life, for instance, and that we live in the United States which already makes us more fortunate than most other people in the world. Counting our blessings as Americans might be the perfect start to our annual Thanksgiving holiday. Education, freedom to dissent, regular mail delivery, technological innovation, religious diversity, individual rights, artistic and literary expressions are expected entitlements in an honest democracy. Most countries of the world, unlike us, do not possess these guarantees and often attempt to stifle or suffocate them. Thanksgiving Day is a unique moment to recognize and celebrate our advantages and good fortune. It is a day to put aside carping and criticism and to put thanks ahead of our wants. Thanksgiving always enriches us, wanting impoverishes.

We all have our own personal lists of thanks: family, friends, long life, health, travel, security, and many other wonderful benefits that we enjoy. The fact that we have survived mistakes, sins, accidents, and illnesses is another good reason to give thanks. After my recent surgery, I am certainly more grateful for good health but also for the care, concern and support I received from so many people. Sickness tells us how loved we are and reminds us to be helpful to others in their needs. For the basis of thanksgiving is to share what we have received and to practice what we expect. Thanksgiving, therefore, is much more than prayer. It is an attitude, an ethic, a way-of-life. If we all consistently lived this way, there would be less tension, hatred and prejudice. We all would be much happier, joyful, and generous.

On Thanksgiving Day this year, perhaps America could interpret thanksgiving as an essential patriotic quality. This means rejecting violence, prejudice, division, and ill-will, celebrating instead the obvious advantages and benefits of living in the United States, which still is an inspiration and hope to so many other countries. America has always been the place to be, the reason immigrants continue to come here. That, I believe, should be a source of national pride, not provocation, for our country. Thanksgiving Day is a moment to appreciate that our strengths surpass our weaknesses.

Thanksgiving is ultimately a spiritual holiday. Most stores, fortunately, will be closed this year. It is more than turkey and TV football. Thanksgiving is a time to reflect on the role of values in our personal lives and in the wider world. Gratitude is an essential part of that reflective process because it takes nothing for granted and places individual responsibility and conscience as ethical absolutes. Thanksgiving also is a moment to harmonize our values, for personal and public standards are not always consistent. We may be kind and generous on a personal level but much less so when confronted with even more pressing needs in the wider arenas of life. Thanksgiving, then, is a time to coordinate our values so that our inner and outer dimensions reflect the same image.