

Thanksgiving Reflections: History of, Blessings, Prayers and Quotations

History of the National Holiday:

Turns out there are a number of contenders for the first thanksgiving in America.

The First Thanksgiving in America was a Catholic Mass

Philip Kosloski | Nov 22, 2016 | Aletheia

<https://aletheia.org/2016/11/22/the-first-thanksgiving-in-america-was-a-catholic-mass/>

Did you know that the first “thanksgiving” meal in the United States was not celebrated by the Pilgrims in Plymouth, but by Spanish settlers, in what became Florida? And that first “Thanksgiving” was Eucharistic!

Historian Dr. Michael Gannon narrates the events that took place on September 8, 1565.

“When the first Spanish settlers landed in what is now St. Augustine on September 8, 1565, to build a settlement, their first act was to hold a religious service to thank God for the safe arrival of the Spanish fleet...After the Mass, Father Francisco Lopez, the Chaplain of the Spanish ships and the first pastor of St. Augustine, stipulated that the natives from the Timucua tribe be fed along with the Spanish settlers, including Don Pedro Menendez de Aviles, the leader of the expedition. It was the very first Thanksgiving and the first Thanksgiving meal in the United States.”



History of the First Thanksgiving – Berkeley Plantation, Virginia 1619

<http://www.berkeleyplantation.com/first-thanksgiving.html>

So it was on September 16, 1619, 12 days after he was commissioned, Captain Woodlief departed Kingrode, Bristol, England, at 8:00 a.m. in the morning on the Good Ship Margaret.

It was a perilous journey....

On the 30th of November, the ship moved into what are now the Hampton Roads. At this point, Captain Woodlief surveyed the landscape, went ashore and met with friends. He got an update from them since his last trip to Virginia. When he returned to the ship, the Margaret proceeded up the King James River and on December 4, 1619, dropped anchor at the Berkeley site. They had finally arrived after such a long journey!

As instructed by the London Company, Woodlief prayed: “We ordaine that this day of our ships arrival, at the place assigned for plantacon, in the land of Virginia, shall be yearly and perpetually kept holy as a day of Thanksgiving to Almighty God.”

You see, the Berkeley Company had given a very specific list of ten instructions to the settlers when they departed England. The very first instruction was upon landing that they give a prayer of Thanksgiving for their safe voyage and to do so annually and perpetually thereafter.

America's first official English speaking Thanksgiving had just occurred, one year and 17 days before the Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts and almost 2 years before the pilgrims held a 3 day Harvest Feast with their Native American friends, which is commonly thought today to be the first Thanksgiving.



Thanksgiving Day is a national holiday in the United States commemorating the harvest of the Plymouth Colony in 1621. The event followed a winter of great hardship.

When it was first inaugurated, only a few eastern states participated. However, through the effort of Sarah Hale a change was effected. She was fired with the determination of having the whole nation join together in setting apart a national day for giving thanks "unto Him from who all blessings flow." To this end, she resolutely engaged the press with an endless flow of letters and articles to the various newspapers and journals of her time. In addition, she pleaded long and earnestly with three Presidents: Fillmore, Pierce and Buchanan during the period of 1852, when her campaign succeeded in uniting 29 states in marking the last Thursday of November as "Thanksgiving Day."

Then came the dark days of the Civil War. Who would listen to a lone woman with her persistent plea for "just one day of peace amidst the blood and the strife"? One man did; her entreaty won the ear of a great American, and in 1863 President Abraham Lincoln officially proclaimed the last Thursday of November as a day set apart for the national giving of thanks unto Almighty God. Lincoln lived to see only two such occasions, but Sarah Hale lived well on into her late 90's, content that her long-cherished hope had at last become a reality.



Prayers & Blessings:

Psalm 111:1-10

Praise for God's Wonderful Works

Praise the Lord!

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

Great are the works of the Lord,
studied by all who have pleasure in them.

Full of honor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures for ever.

He has caused his wonderful works to be remembered;
the Lord is gracious and merciful.

He provides food for those who fear him;
he is ever mindful of his covenant.

He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the heritage of the nations.

The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy,
they are established for ever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

He sent redemption to his people;

he has commanded his covenant for ever.
Holy and awesome is his name!
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
a good understanding have all those who practice it.
His praise endures for ever!

The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006)



Father, all Powerful,
your gifts of love are countless
and your goodness infinite;
as we come before you on Thanksgiving Day
with gratitude for your kindness,
open our hearts to have concern
for every man, woman, and child,
so that we may share your gifts in loving service.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Thanksgiving Day Mass: Collect
The Roman Missal: Third Typical Edition
(Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), 1004



God most provident,
we join all creation,
in raising to you a hymn of thanksgiving
through Jesus Christ, your Son.

For generation upon generation
peoples of this land have sung of your bounty;
we too offer your praise
for the rich harvest we have received at your hands.

Bless us and this food from which we share with grateful hearts,

Continue to make our land fruitful
and let our love for you be seen
in our pursuit of peace and justice
and in our generous response to those in need.

Praise and glory to you, Lord God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Prayer of Blessing
Book of Blessings: Study Edition



A Thanksgiving Prayer
By Rabbi Naomi Levy

For the laughter of the children,
For my own life breath,
For the abundance of food on this table,
For the ones who prepared this sumptuous feast,
For the roof over our heads,
The clothes on our backs,
For our health,
And our wealth of blessings,
For this opportunity to celebrate with family and friends,
For the freedom to pray these words
Without fear,
In any language,
In any faith,
In this great country,
Whose landscape is as vast and beautiful as her inhabitants.
Thank You, God, for giving us all these. Amen.

From *Talking to God: Personal Prayers for Times of Joy, Sadness, Struggle, and Celebration* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York)



A Thanksgiving Prayer
Samuel F. Pugh

O God, when I have food,
 help me to remember the hungry;
When I have work,
 help me to remember the jobless;
When I have a home,
 help me to remember those who have no home at all;
When I am without pain,
 help me to remember those who suffer,
And remembering,
 help me to destroy my complacency;
 bestir my compassion,
 and be concerned enough to help;
By word and deed,
 those who cry out for what we take for granted.

Amen.



For the haunting rhythm of our universe,
we thank you, Creator and Lord.
For the still-reaching reachers of our world,
we thank you, Creator and Lord.
For giving us a history and a destiny,
we thank you, Redeemer and Lord.
For becoming yourself, a man among men,
we thank you, Redeemer and Lord.
For drawing us into the mystery of life and love,
we thank you, Spirit and Lord.
For touching us with stars and blades of grass,
we thank you, Spirit and Lord.”



Prayer of Thanksgiving
Vienna Cobb Anderson

God of all blessings,
source of all life, giver of all grace:
We thank you for the gift of life:
for the breath that sustains life,
for the food of this earth that nurtures life,
for the love of family and friends
without which there would be no life.

We thank you for the mystery of creation:
for the beauty that the eye can see,
for the joy that the ear may hear,
for the unknown
that we cannot behold filling the universe with wonder,
for the expanse of space that draws us
beyond the definitions of our selves.

We thank you for setting us in communities:
for families who nurture our becoming,
for friends who love us by choice,
for companions at work,
who share our burdens and daily tasks,
for strangers who welcome us into their midst,
for people from other lands
who call us to grow in understanding,
for children who lighten our moments with delight,
for the unborn, who offer us hope for the future.

We thank you for this day:
for life and one more day to love,
for opportunity and one more day
to work for justice and peace,
for neighbors and one more person to love
and by whom be loved,
for your grace and one more experience of your presence,

for your promise: to be with us,
to be our God, and to give salvation.

For these, and all blessings,
we give you thanks, eternal, loving God,
through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

We Thank Thee...



Robert Louis Stevenson

Lord, behold our family here assembled.

We thank Thee for this place in which we dwell;
for the love that unites us;
for the peace accorded us this day;
for the hope with which we expect the morrow;
for the health, the work, the food, and the bright skies,
that make our lives delightful;
and for our friends in all parts of the earth.

Let peace abound in our small company.
Purge out of every heart the lurking grudge.
Give us grace and strength to forbear and to persevere.
Give us the grace to accept and to forgive offenders.
Forgetful ourselves, help us to bear cheerfully
the forgetfulness of others.
Give us courage and gaiety and the quiet mind.
Spare to us our friends, soften to us our enemies.
Bless us, if it may be, in all our innocent endeavors.

If it may not, give us the strength to encounter
that which is to come,
that we be brave in peril, constant in tribulation,
temperate in wrath,
and in all changes of fortune, and,
down to the gates of death,
loyal and loving one to another.



Prayer for the Harvest

Most gracious God,
by whose knowledge the depths are broken up
and the clouds drop down the dew:
We yield thee hearty thanks and praise for the return
of seedtime and harvest,
for the increase of the ground
and the gathering in the of its fruits,

and for all the other blessings of they merciful providence bestowed upon this nation and people.

And, we beseech thee,
give us a just sense of these great mercies,
such as may appear in our lives
by a humble, holy, and obedient walking before thee
all our days;
through Jesus Christ our lord, to whom, with thee
and the Holy Spirit be all glory and honor,
world without end.

Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer
The Seabury Press, 1979, p, 840, #9



Proclamations:

Governor William Bradford of Massachusetts made this first Thanksgiving Proclamation three years after the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth:

Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, beans, squashes, and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as He has protected us from the ravages of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience.

Now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday, November 29th, of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty three and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings.



Proclamation for a National Day of
Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer
President Abraham Lincoln – April 30, 1863

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved, the many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to God that made us! It behooves us, then to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.



President Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Thanksgiving Proclamation

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.

In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign states to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere, except in the theater of military conflict, while that theater has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.

Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well as the iron and coal as of our precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege, and the battlefield, and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens.

And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the imposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the divine purpose, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union.



Thanksgiving Proclamation
President Calvin Coolidge

We have been a most favored people. We ought to be a most grateful people.
We have been a most blessed people. We ought to be a most thankful people.



Reflections:

Reflections for Thanksgiving

Here are some questions to help you think about what to be thankful for:

What are a few things you are grateful for in your life?

Who do you need to thank for helping you get where you are?

Who can you reach out to in order to renew a friendship?

Write a letter to someone you want to thank.

Is there a family member you can forgive or ask forgiveness of?

How do you like to be thanked?

When was the last time you thanked someone?



Quotations:

“Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

“The greatest gift one can give is thanksgiving. In giving gifts, we give what we can spare, but in giving thanks we give ourselves.”

Br. David Steindl-Rast

“In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Is my life one of thanksgiving to God for all the gifts and graces I have received? Meister Eckhart, the famous German theologian who died in the fourteenth century, said, “If the only prayer you say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.”

“Thanksgiving is the attitude of the life that acknowledges the contribution from God, from others, from life.”

~ C. Neil Strait

“He who forgets the language of gratitude can never be on speaking terms with happiness.”

~ C. Neil Strait

“Thanksgiving puts power into living, because it opens the generators of the heart to respond gratefully, to receive joyfully, and to react creatively.”

~ C. Neil Strait

“Appreciation is a wonderful thing: it makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.”

~ Voltaire (1694–1778)

“Gratitude is a seasoning for all seasons.”

“Gratitude is the heart’s memory.”

~ French Proverb

“How happy a person is depends upon the depth of his gratitude.”

~ John Miller (1923–1961)

“It is only with gratitude that life becomes rich.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945)

“Swift gratitude is the sweetest.”

~ Greek Proverb

“When the heart is full, the eyes overflow.”

~ Sholem Aleichem (1859–1916)

“No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks.”

~ St. Ambrose

“Every gift has its return of praise.”

~ H.E. Manning

“Our forefathers were not so much thankful for something as they were thankful in something. In bounty or in want they were thankful. In feast or in famine they were thankful. In joy or in misery they were thankful. There is a big difference between being thankful for things and being thankful in all things.”

~ Brett Blair



Illustrations:

A Half-Baked Thanksgiving

Edward M. Hays

adapted from *A Pilgrim’s Almanac*, p. 182

Forest of Peace Books

used with permission

The other day there was an article about a newspaper food editor who on the day before Thanksgiving received a telephone call from a youthful sounding woman. The woman asked how long it takes to roast a 19 1/2 pound turkey. "Just a minute," said the food editor as she turned to consult a chart on the office wall. "Thanks a lot!" said the caller – click – as she hung up.

That young cook must have served a Thanksgiving feast fit for wild animals. To believe that a turkey that large could be cooked in one minute is a sign of our times. We have "One Minute Managers", "One Minute Rice", one minute this or instant that. What once took days to prepare, now only takes minutes, whether developing a photograph, preparing food or faxing a message across the continent. But some things, like roasting a 19 1/2 pound turkey, still require time.

Friendship takes time, education takes time, meals that are truly holy and wholesome take time-and so does prayer. We Americans are a people who suffer from a great poverty of time. We are always short of time: time to write letters, time to visit with friends, time to enjoy life, and time to rest with our Lord. And the near future, especially for middle-class Americans, will find our clocks running faster and faster. With husbands and wives both working, with numerous commitments to the parish, school and community and with children involved in numerous extracurricular activities, there is less and less quality time within the family. Consequently, we can expect to see, in the coming years, more instant foods and quick worship services.

But just as a 19 1/2 pound turkey baked only for a minute will be a disaster dinner, so will prayers dashed off "on the run." The soul, like the body, knows hunger, and it will not easily be able to digest even a half-baked prayer, let alone some kind of "minute meditation." Delicious prayer, like a properly baked turkey, requires the same first step: the oven must first be preheated to about 450 degrees. One way to preheat the ovens of our hearts to the proper prayer temperature is with the fire of gratitude and thanksgiving and love for God. Failure to do so may result in properly recited but half-baked prayers.

Next, you need to stuff your prayer, before placing it in the heart oven, with generous handfuls of gratitude, seasoned with humility, plus a dash of awareness of your created goodness to remind you of who God is. Then, frequently baste your prayer with the fullness of attention, by bringing your mind back again and again from its constant wanderings.

By the way, regarding the correct cooking time, allow at least twenty to twenty-five minutes per pound if you want a royal Thanksgiving feast.



A Letter of Gratitude

Source Unknown

Sower's Seeds of Encouragement: 100 Stories of Hope, Humor & Healing, p. 13

One Thanksgiving some years ago, while watching a football game, a successful businessman reflected on his life and thought of all the people who had been influential in helping him become who he was. He decided to write each person a thank you card telling him or her of his gratitude for their influence on his life.

His fourth grade teacher quickly came to mind for her insistence in striving for excellence in every endeavor. She pounded it into her students, be it regarding homework, tests, or class projects. So he sent her a thank-you note.

One day, just after the new year, he received a return letter from his former teacher. She apologized for not replying sooner, but stated that his letter took some time getting to her, since she had moved in with her daughter after retiring from 66 years of teaching grade school. She told him how thankful she was to have received his card and how it cheered her to find out he had learned so well his lessons in excellence. She went on to say that in her 66 years of teaching, this was the first thank you card she had ever received, and how grateful she was that he had taken the time to remember her.

So who is it that needs to hear from you during this holiday season?



A story is told of Abraham Lincoln. One day the President summoned to the White House a surgeon in the Army of the Cumberland from the state of Ohio. The major assumed that he was to be commended for some exceptional work. During the conversation Mr. Lincoln asked the major about his widowed mother. "She is doing fine," he responded.

"How do you know," asked Lincoln. "You haven't written her. But she has written me," replied President Lincoln. "She thinks that you are dead and she is asking that a special effort be made to return your body."

At that the Commander and Chief placed a pen in the young doctor's hand and ordered him to write a letter letting his mother know that he was alive and well.

Oh, the blessings that we take for granted. Oh, the wretchedness of ingratitude. It was Shakespeare who worded it more appropriately than ever we could. He wrote: "Blow, blow thou winter wind. Thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude."



"Overflowing Gratitude"
Fr. Brian Cavanaugh, TOR

"Here's a thought based on Oprah's book club: Sit down at the end of each day and write out 5 things for which you are grateful.

We go through life each day so unaware, and take for granted so many things. There are those persons, unseen and unknown, to whom we need to be grateful. We take for granted turning on a light switch. We assume electricity will light the lamp, but how about the people that keep the system running? Same for the water, and the supermarket. We walk in and everyday it's filled with food. How did it get on the shelves; how did it get to the stores; how did it get out of the fields; how did it first get planted?

Everyday we need to overflow with gratitude. Looking at life from such a perspective will begin to change our daily attitude towards all life, and, possibly, even towards our self and others."



“A Hundred Dollar Word”

Rudyard Kipling was a great writer and poet whose writings most of us have enjoyed. Unlike many old writers, Kipling was one of the few who had opportunity to enjoy his success while he lived. He also made a great deal of money at his trade.

One time a newspaper reporter came up to him and said, “Mr. Kipling, I just read that somebody calculated that the money you make from your writings amounts to over a hundred dollars a word; Mr. Kipling raised his eyebrows and said, “Really, I wasn’t aware of that.”

The reporter cynically reached down into his pocket and pulled out a one hundred dollar bill and gave it to Kipling and said, “Here’s a hundred dollar bill, Mr. Kipling. Now, you give me one of your hundred dollar words.”

Mr. Kipling looked at that hundred dollar bill for a moment, took it and folded it up and put it in his pocket and said, “Thanks.”

He’s right! The word THANKS is certainly a hundred dollar word. In fact, it is more like a million dollar word. It’s one word that is too seldom heard and too rarely spoken and too often forgotten. If we would all adopt an attitude of thanksgiving into our lives – our lives would be changed. We would savor each day.

