

Give Thanks TO THE LORD

For Americans, Thanksgiving Day is a special day when we celebrate family unity. In fact, families get together on Thanksgiving more often than on any other holiday, including Christmas.

But besides the traditional family get-together and the big meal, there is also the religious meaning of the holiday that has been present since its origins. According to tradition, the pilgrims celebrated the first meal of thanksgiving in 1621 together with a group of natives to give thanks to God for the abundance of the harvests in the new world. In 1789 President George Washington recognized an official holiday of "sincere and humble thanks." Later, in 1863, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed Thanksgiving a national holiday

to be celebrated specifically on the last Thursday of November.

Today, we celebrate Thanksgiving not only as a national holiday but also as a day symbolic for Catholics. After all, the word *Eucharist* comes from the Greek word, *eukaristein*, which means *thanksgiving*.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that "Believing in God, the only One, and loving him with all our being has enormous consequences for our whole life" (#222). Then it adds that this includes "living in thanksgiving: if God is the only One, everything we are and have comes from him: 'What have you that you did not receive?' (1 Cor 4:7) 'What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me? (Ps 116:12)'" (#224).

Although Thanksgiving is not a strictly a religious holiday, nevertheless because a eucharistic celebration is most appropriate the US Bishops encourage US Catholics to celebrate it with readings taken from the the Mass "In Thanksgiving to God" found in the *Lectionary for Ritual Masses*.

Thanksgiving should not only be celebrated with a deep sense of prayer, gratitude and joy, but the celebration this day should lead us to remember that our lives are a continual thanksgiving through our daily activities, all of which should give glory to God, especially through the celebration of the Eucharist.



Give thanks to the LORD, who is good,
whose mercy endures forever.

—Psalm 106:1



I give thanks to my God always on
your account for the grace of God
bestowed on you in Christ Jesus,
that in him you were enriched in
every way, with all discourse and all
knowledge.

—1 Corinthians 1:4-5



For everything
created by God is good, and nothing
is to be rejected when received with
thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the
invocation of God in prayer.

—1 Timothy 4:4-5



Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.
In all circumstances give thanks, for
this is the will of God for you in Christ
Jesus. —1 Thessalonians 5:16-18



Let us come before God with a song
of praise, joyfully sing out our psalms.
For the LORD is the great God, the
great king over all gods.

—Psalm 95:2-3

Thanksgiving at Home

For Christians, every Sunday is Thanksgiving Day, for the term *eucharist* comes from a Greek word which means “thanksgiving.” The American Catholic *Lectionary* includes an appendix with readings for Thanksgiving Mass. Perhaps it is fitting that Thanksgiving is not a mandatory feast, for gratitude is best served by voluntary expressions like the ones suggested below.

Give from Your Table: Numerous agencies, parishes, and food banks offer opportunities to feed the hungry at Thanksgiving. Give what you are able to support those efforts.

Bless Your Bread: Your parish may include a blessing of bread at its morning Eucharist. If not, families can bless their bread at home, extending hands over it before it is baked or served.

Count Your blessings: The Thanksgiving newspaper comes stuffed with Black Friday ads. Instead of starting your “wish lists” or shopping, make a family “thanks list” and read it aloud.

Say Grace before Dinner: Have each member place grain seed, stuffing cubes, or candy corn—symbols of God’s gifts—into a goblet. Then pass the goblet and have each person hold it while naming a blessing. Then say grace or read Psalm 67.

Celebrate the Eucharist: Most parishes have one morning Mass on Thanksgiving Day. The Eucharist is a graceful way to begin the day focused on God’s blessings in praise and thanks.

MORE ABOUT *Thanksgiving Day & The Church*

Harvest festivals thanking God for favors received are common among all cultures and religions. Ritual feasts of thanksgiving to Yahweh were a vital part of the Israelite religion, which had two thanksgiving festival periods, one in the spring and one in the fall.

The Church has never had a feast dedicated specifically to thanksgiving—likely because thanksgiving is already an integral part of all liturgical celebration. But in the late Middle Ages in Europe, thanksgiving themes became part of the feast day of St. Martin on Nov. 11.

The history of Thanksgiving Day in the U.S. reveals that the observance was primarily Protestant in its origins, and that wide Catholic recognition and acceptance of the holiday came late.

Traditionally, the first Thanksgiving was thought to be a festival in the fall of 1621 at the Pilgrim settlement in Plymouth, MA. Pilgrim settlers and Native Ameri-

cans celebrated a good harvest. By the 1660s, some New England communities were holding a Thanksgiving feast annually, but it was not until two centuries later that Abraham Lincoln set the last Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day.

By the late 1800s, some Catholic priests forbade parishioners to celebrate what seemed to them a public Protestant festival. However, Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore allowed it.

During the 1900s, Catholics were marking Thanksgiving Day as many others were, with private family meals and celebrations, and, less so, by attending parades or other public events.

It was not until 1969 that the American Bishops Committee on the Liturgy prepared and published *Lectionary* readings and prayers for a Mass specifically for Thanksgiving Day.