



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Thanksgiving to God for the Fruits of the Earth, Thursday, November 28th, 2013

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
And of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

There's something a bit odd about organizing and it would seem decidedly odd to plan a lavish feast to celebrate some mighty achievement and deliberately fail to invite person who made it all happen. It wouldn't just be a case of bad manners it would also be utterly stupid. It would make the celebration completely pointless. Yet that today is exactly the way most Americans seem to treat Thanksgiving.

The purpose of Thanksgiving is not to celebrate the existence the turkey – one of the most profoundly simple-minded creatures that ever lived; an animal (if it can rightly be termed an animal rather than a barely mobile vegetable) that absolutely deserves to be cooked.

The *raison d'etre* for Thanksgiving is to give thanks to God for the bountiful gifts he has showered upon us. This is why the first settlers in Virginia, Maryland and Massachusetts initiated the celebration. And this is the reason why President George Washington proclaimed it after the defeat of the British army, then the most formidable fighting force in the world.

Yet today God is far from the central focus of Thanksgiving Day. Indeed, he

comes far behind turkey, pumpkin pie and football. Thanksgiving has become more a celebration of the family than a celebration of God's gifts at the harvest.

This is by no means entirely bad. Indeed, how can one condemn something that offers America's tens of thousands of fractured and dysfunctional families a taste of togetherness, if not in front of a flickering fire then a flickering TV screen.

Yet even in the countryside, Thanksgiving celebrations in the traditional manner are rapidly vanishing. We live in an age of factory farming. Technology is king. We plant two or three crops and grow 'em by hundreds of acres. Farm kids are raised on the same pre-packaged, homogenized diets as their counterparts in town. And they, too, probably wouldn't even recognize their foodstuffs in their natural state.

But the fact of the matter is that we are not a whit less dependent on God's grace for what the prayer book calls "the returns of the fruits of the earth" than we were 350 years ago. The fact that most of us can't tell the difference

between a field of wheat, barley, rye or linseed doesn't make the grain harvest any less important.

Modern pesticides and fertilizers have vastly increased our farmers' yields, and the enormous advances in food preservation and refrigeration technologies in recent years have enormously improved our storage and distribution capabilities.

But this does not diminish the importance of God's role in the process. There are so many more mouths to feed than there were half a century ago, famine would have been endemic had God not endowed us with powers of invention.

Back in the late 1970s, long before "climate change" had become the *crise de jour* – even before "global warming" and its predecessor: "nuclear winter – doomsayer Paul Ehrlich wrote *The Population Bomb*", a book prophesying widespread and catastrophic famines starting in the mid-1970s.

But Erlich reckoned without our God-given power of invention. Thanks to this God-given resourcefulness new farming techniques, agricultural technologies, and genetic engineering have not only granted our nation an abundant food supply, they have also enabled us to feed many parts of the world where hunger was once endemic. That is a very real reason for us – and the rest of the world – to give him thanks.

But our God-given cleverness has proved a bane as well as a blessing. It often develops into an infatuation with our own intellects that keeps us from developing any meaningful relationship with our maker. We give ourselves the credit for our ability to grow larger, less flavorful vegetables than our forebears, oblivious of the fact

that cultivation and creation are horses of entirely different colors.

It is in this light that we should consider today's gospel. In it, Jesus explains that if we say we believe in God, we ought to act like it. If we believe, for example, that he really is the almighty, all-seeing, all-loving creator of all things then we ought to trust him to care for us and act in our best interests.

He is urging us cultivate a childlike faith. The word "childlike" is not to be confused with the word "childish." There's nothing childish about a childlike faith. Nothing could be more mature. After all, Jesus says: "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."

Children, for example, have no difficulty with the concept of miracles. Children instinctively grasp that, for God, doing a miracle is simply a piece of cake. Adults, by contrast, distract themselves with pointless questions that have no bearing on the real issue. Rather than ponder **WHY** God performs a particular miracle, we try to figure out the unimportant technicalities concerning **HOW** he performs it.

Kids go directly to the heart of the matter – to the "Why?" not to the "How?" And they have no difficulty accepting that the unsophisticated but entirely correct answer is: "Because God loves us."

It is important to know the right answer because until we can accept God's love, we will find it impossible show him the gratitude we owe him. Indeed, it is the acceptance of his love that puts the "thanks" in Thanksgiving. *AMEN*.