



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Thanksgiving Day, 26th November, 2015

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

As Christians, we really are spoiled for choice in thanksgiving days. However, the American national feast thereof, was first proclaimed on October 3rd, 1789 by George Washington to be celebrated on the last Thursday in November of that year. Seventy-four years to the day Abraham Lincoln proclaimed it a national holiday. The year was 1863.

It would seem an incongruous time to be given to thanksgiving. The harvest of the fields that year was measured in bodies not bushels: God's bounty laid waste, two countries embroiled in terrible war, hundreds of thousands dead, and foreign countries quietly wagering the outcome. Yet here is the perfect time, and it is here we find our Lord Jesus Christ teaching us from the mount.

In Chapter 6 Christ gives us very clear instructions on the manner in which we should pray, "give us this day our daily bread." and goes on to warn against the laying up of treasure and lust for money.

It's no wonder then, that Christ, in verse 25 begins teaching us how to frame and prioritize our needs, and quite literally, address them: To Him, and thereby gain a more Christian perspective of the Almighty, and his loving providence at work with and in creation.

"Take no thought for your life". Here the more literal translation is "be not

anxious". Now Christ isn't telling us that we can sit around and wait for his providence to be lowered to us in baskets from heaven. After all, our Lord himself speaks many times of honest labor, and in Luke chapter 14 councils' prudence, "For which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down and counteth not the cost..." Our Lord is telling us that as Christians we must certainly be mindful of earthly things and responsibilities, but not overwhelmed by them; putting all things in their proper place; the life more than the meat, and the body more than the raiment. By using a light/heavy comparison (a rabbinical teaching aid) Christ is speaking of soul and body. The life he speaks of is the everlasting life we obtain through faith in him and his blood.

As Christ continues, "fowls of the air," and how they, "sow not, neither do they reap," he is underscoring the order of his Father's universe and how the maker of all will surely provide the sustenance required to support all of his creation. After all, why would God create his children let alone the birds of the air if he did not intend to provide for them? It is important to note that our Savior is not condemning the fowls that must obviously gather and provide for themselves and their young. The sin is not in the acquisition of that which we can glean from God's bounty through our endeavors

and labors for quiet and holy enjoyment of life; it is in the consuming worry over them. By putting our earthly needs before our thanks to, and acknowledgement of God's loving providence in our lives, we supplant him and make him secondary to his own gifts. To do so is, as Jeremy Taylor (a 17th c. theologian of note), would say is a "manifest infidelity." and is absolutely pointless: "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" v 27. Of course the rhetorical nature of this question is obvious, but as Christ continues, the importance of this question flowers.

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they toil not nor do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these." Christ is not just using the natural beauty of his Father's creation just to draw an allusion.

He is giving an historical and definite example of his continued care for us both in soul and body, and how when we truly follow Christ in prayer and action, we please him.

Solomon is really a quintessential lesson on relationships with the Almighty. In 1 Kings 3, the Lord asks Solomon, "Ask what I can give thee." What does he do? He can ask for anything. Anything! Power, wealth, long life are all up for grabs. But first Solomon says to God, "Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David, my father great mercy..." and he goes on, "that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day." Solomon then goes on to lay his earthly troubles on the Lord, "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in." and laments the task of ruling so great a people. And with all this facing Him, his youth, inexperience, and timidity, Solomon asks for wisdom and understanding to rule "thy so great a people". And for this he is arrayed in the glory of God's bounty, including the extra cubit of which Christ

speaks. Because he gave thanks, acknowledging his place in the world and more importantly God's, and he didn't let the tasks and burdens set before him overwhelm him. He reverently, and orderly placed his needs before the Lord with thanksgiving.

Unfortunately like those grasses and flowers, "which to day is and tomorrow is cast into the oven." Solomon's assiduous faith withered and died because he became to consumed by other lusts and cares of this life. And like our Lord's cautionary use of Solomon in today's Gospel, those flowers and grasses, by God's grace, do double duty. They heated ovens which were used to cook bread with intense heat. So not only do they feed the soul by their beauty, they feed the body as well.

So as we stand on our own personal battlefields, mustering our great peoples, or just fending off the landlord and balancing the checkbook, pray, give thanks, and, "take no thought." for the in sundry evils of the day. And this national day of thanksgiving God feeds our souls at his table, and as he feeds our bodies from his bounty at our homes; let us obey our Lord's teachings. Pray, Give Thanks, and be not anxious. Try to realize the immense nature of God's love, shown through the gift of his only-begotten Son our Lord, and the complexity of his Providence for us. And as we slip into our tryptophan induced comas, I pray that we, "consider the lilies of the field", the smell of freshly turned spring earth which gave it root, our families, the warm camaraderie of friends and colleagues, the laughter of a child or grandchild and being kissed awake by some one you love. After all, Christ's love makes everyday a Happy Thanksgiving. Amen.