

Thanksgiving Day Tradition

INTRODUCTION

The Pilgrims who sailed to U.S.A aboard the *Mayflower* were originally members of the English Separatist Church (a Puritan sect). They had earlier fled their home in England and sailed to Holland (The Netherlands) to escape religious persecution. There, they enjoyed more religious tolerance, but they eventually became disenchanted with the Dutch way of life, thinking it ungodly. Seeking a better life, the Separatists negotiated with a London stock company to finance a pilgrimage to America. Most of those making the trip aboard the *Mayflower* were non-Separatists, but were hired to protect the company's interests. Only about one-third of the original colonists were Separatists.

The Pilgrims set ground at Plymouth Rock on December 11, 1620. Their first winter was devastating. At the beginning of the following fall, they had lost 46 of the original 102 who sailed on the *Mayflower*. But the harvest of 1621 was a bountiful one. And the remaining colonists decided to celebrate with a feast -- including 91 Indians who had helped the Pilgrims survive their first year. It is believed that the Pilgrims would not have made it through the year without the help of the natives. The feast was more of a traditional English harvest festival than a true "thanksgiving" observance. It lasted three days.

Governor William Bradford sent "four men fowling" after wild ducks and geese. It is not certain that wild turkey was part of their feast. However, it is certain that they had venison. The term "turkey" was used by the Pilgrims to mean any sort of wild fowl.

Many People think of Thanksgiving as a wonderful time to celebrate getting out of school for a long weekend, and eating a great dinner. Or, maybe they think it is the start of the Christmas holiday season. What is the real meaning behind Thanksgiving? Catherine Millard writes:



We can trace this historic American Christian tradition to the year 1623. After the harvest crops were gathered in November 1623, Governor William Bradford of the 1620 Pilgrim Colony, "Plymouth Plantation" in Plymouth, Massachusetts proclaimed:

"All ye Pilgrims with your wives and little ones, do gather at the Meeting House, on the hill... there to listen to the pastor, and **render Thanksgiving to the Almighty God for all His blessings.**"



This is the origin of our annual Thanksgiving Day celebration. Congress of the United States has proclaimed National Days of Thanksgiving to Almighty God many times throughout the following years. On November 1, 1777, by order of Congress, the first National Thanksgiving Proclamation was proclaimed, and signed by Henry Laurens, President of Continental Congress. The third Thursday of December, 1777 was thus officially set aside:

"...for solemn thanksgiving and praise. That with one heart and one voice the good people may **express the grateful feelings of their hearts, and consecrate themselves to the service of their Divine Benefactor;... and their humble and earnest supplication that it may please God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, mercifully to forgive and blot them (their manifold sins) out of remembrance...** That it may please Him... to take schools and seminaries of education, so necessary for cultivating the principles of true liberty, virtue and piety under His nurturing hand, and to prosper the means of religion for the promotion and enlargement of that kingdom which consisteth of 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost'..."



Then again, on January 1, 1795, our first United States President, George Washington, wrote his famed National Thanksgiving Proclamation, in which he says that it is...

"...our duty as a people, with devout reverence and affectionate gratitude, **to acknowledge our many and great obligations to Almighty God, and to implore Him to continue is... our duty as a people, with devout reverence and affectionate gratitude, to acknowledge our many and great obligations to Almighty God, and to implore Him to continue and confirm the blessings we experienced...**"

Thursday, the 19th day of February, 1795 was thus set aside by George Washington as a National Day of Thanksgiving.



Many years later, on October 3, 1863, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed, by Act of Congress, an annual National Day of Thanksgiving "on the last Thursday of November, as **a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens.**" In this Thanksgiving proclamation, our 16th President says that it is...

"...announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations are blessed whose God is the Lord... 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, by the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own...** It has seemed to me fit and proper that God should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people..."



So it is that on Thanksgiving Day each year, Americans give thanks to Almighty God for all His blessings and mercies toward us throughout the year.

CONCLUSION

"The Holy God having by a long and Continual Series of his Afflictive dispensations in and by the present Warr with the Heathen Natives of this land, written and brought to pass bitter things against his own Covenant people in this wilderness, yet so that we evidently discern that in the midst of his judgements he hath remembered mercy, having remembered his Footstool in the day of his sore displeasure against us for our sins, with many singular Intimations of his Fatherly Compassion, and regard; reserving many of our Towns from Desolation Threatened, and attempted by the Enemy, and giving us especially of late with many of our Confederates many signal Advantages against them, without such Disadvantage to ourselves as formerly we have

been sensible of, if it be the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed, It certainly bespeaks our positive Thankfulness, when our Enemies are in any measure disappointed or destroyed; and fearing the Lord should take notice under so many Intimations of his returning mercy, we should be found an Insensible people, as not standing before Him with Thanksgiving, as well as lading him with our Complaints in the time of pressing Afflictions:

The Council has thought meet to appoint and set apart the 29th day of this instant June, as a day of Solemn Thanksgiving and praise to God for such his Goodness and Favour, many Particulars of which mercy might be Instanced, but we doubt not those who are sensible of God's Afflictions, have been as diligent to espy him returning to us; and that the Lord may behold us as a People offering Praise and thereby glorifying Him; the Council doth commend it to the Respective Ministers, Elders and people of this Jurisdiction; Solemnly and seriously to keep the same Beseeching that being perswaded by the mercies of God we may all, even this whole people offer up our bodies and soulds as a living and acceptable Service unto God by Jesus Christ."