

## THINKING OF THANKING AT THANKSGIVING

We are coming to what has been called the “purest” of all American holidays (at least, insofar as crass commercialism is concerned)—Thanksgiving. Though it marks the “official” beginning of Christmas shopping season (the “real” beginning, it seems, was Labor Day), and though the goal of many Americans on this day is one that joins conspicuous consumption of saturated fats with reclining in front of a TV, semi-comatose, during football games, still the holiday itself has one fundamental emphasis: giving thanks.

No doubt the original “Dissenters” from England who celebrated the 1<sup>st</sup> Thanksgiving feast would be shocked to think that what they were doing could have any association to a Catholic Mass. Nevertheless, as Catholics, we should be very much at home with this coming Thursday’s holiday: *eucharistein*, the root word in Greek, literally means “to give thanks,” and NO Christian denomination or Church celebrates Eucharist as often as we do—we have the opportunity to partake at the Lord’s table on a daily basis.

Let me make a somewhat different connection between this day and our sacramental celebration. Let’s set the scene at the Last Supper. Jesus knew what was about to happen, as far as arrest was concerned. His whole mission was to preach the Kingdom and offer himself as redeemer. Knowing the price (a price he would desperately pray could be avoided, only a little later, in Gethsemane), he nevertheless took bread and gave thanks. It was an act that was as much as to say, “I offer in this bread my body, but also my whole self—my past, present and future, including the near future of suffering—and for that I give thanks to the Father.”

How much can and do we give thanks also when we celebrate Eucharist? We say or sing in the Memorial Acclamation, “When we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus, until you come again.” Do we realize the depth of love offered to us to eat and drink? The death—the violent and agonizing death—of a gift of self in sacrifice; the resurrection (without which there would be no reason for any continual memorial) and its promise of atonement and healing; the anticipation of being united with Christ and with the whole Body in the harmony of the Kingdom. All this, in the smallest of signs—a host and sip of wine—which are his glorified Body & Blood, to make us one in him. We become, little by little, day by day, configured to Christ.

Our teens recently served up a wonderful “Thanks for Giving” dinner to our “seasoned citizen” parishioners. An old spiritual sings, “Jesus has done so much for me; I cannot tell it all, I cannot tell it all.” Perhaps we cannot “tell it all,” either. But how much thanks will we give for all Christ has done for us?