

Renewal: Touchstone of Thankfulness

(Fourth and last in a series on "Basic Attitudes for a Year of Renewal")

Thanksgiving is upon us once more. Thoughts precede travelers homeward bound. Hearts fondly recall family traditions which cluster around this special day: the blessings of harvest fields and Autumn red-gold trees are now a warm memory in the November wind. The first snowfall is a prelude to Winter's harsh realities. Yet for all that, gratitude is an inward warmth. The flame of reflectiveness brings the candle of memory to a mellow glow.



To think is to thank.

I recall a wise old man from my boyhood days. No initials followed his name, yet the wrinkles in his face bespoke the wisdom of the ages. One day he spoke a voluminous in a few words: "We, all of us, are as old as our sins, and as young as our gratitude."

The passing years have more deeply impressed the wisdom of his remark. Sin is a stagnation, a satisfaction with our self-centeredness. Selfishness forfeits the power to wonder, to be enthusiastic, to have the youthful heart. Self-absorption shrinks the horizons of one's world. It encourages complacency. Nothing new is welcome. Heart and mind — and arteries, too — harden. There is no accommodation for fresh ideas.

In essence, the selfish person is a thoughtless person.

On the other hand, gratitude is first and foremost a response. To be alert and open is a revitalizing process. Thankfulness is to stand in awe at the opportunities that life offers us, to accept the range of options before us. The spirit of newness prompts us to act in a way that is creative of what we, under God, are called to become. Renewal is possible only through an affirmation of what we believe possible. Renewal is acceptance of growth opportunities beyond our present development.

Thus, the first imperative proclaimed by Jesus was a summons to renewal. "The time has been fulfilled and the Rule of God has drawn near. Undergo a change of heart and believe in the good news." (Mk 1: 15)

Jesus' message means simply this: Now is God's supreme breakthrough into human history. God's love urges a return of our love, love calling forth love. Renewal of our attitudes is an absolute. To accept God's initiative of love is the good news which defies all human understanding. Therefore, thankfulness means celebrating the mystery of God's love for all men.

In sum and substance, that is what our entire Year of Renewal is about. To determine our stance towards God's love, embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, three basic questions need to be asked. And nothing less than a searching, honest answer will do. First, how willing are we to undergo the renewal called for

by the Gospel — indeed by Jesus Himself, as a condition for entering the Kingdom or Rule of God. Second, how ready are we to accept God's breakthrough into our history, into our diocese, into our lives — with all the implications that such an inquiry contains and demands. Third, how able are we to read prayerfully the signs of the times and to encourage everyone to discover what God is saying to us at this point in time?

To think is to thank.

Gratitude is recognition of our enrichment by another. Because it is expressed in the language of the heart, gratitude glances to the past to see where enrichment has come, but it looks primarily to the future to determine where more effective response is possible. For gratitude is meaningless unless it closes the distance between benefactor and beneficiary.

Enrichment commits us to constant renewal. Renewal means to become better than we are, to achieve fuller emancipation from whatever locks us within the prison-house of the past or the self. Renewal means to be open to God's spirit which renews the face of the earth.

To think is to thank.

To think of renewal in Gospel terms is to thank God. Renewal is gospel. Gospel is gratitude. Gratitude means memory revitalized by fresh beginnings.

After all, aren't we really only as young as our gratitude?

The Slot Man

Ever Had a Shot for Thanksgiving?

Thanksgiving seems to be a very special kind of holiday for most people, with an aura of real "Americana" about it. That's one of the things that makes it so appealing, photographer Larry Keefe and I agreed, while discussing it recently.



It also is a very nostalgic day and one that seems to leave its imprint upon memories more than most holidays.

My remembrances of Thanksgiving at home are warm and rosy and pungent. Fall treats of pumpkin and squash, The Bird, and perhaps most of all the relaxation. Thanksgiving should never be a formal thing.

But I remember One Thanksgiving when I was 12 years old. I was a newspaper boy in a rather poor neighborhood. Making collections always was a problem and I decided on this particular Thanksgiving

to try and collect from three of four customers who were way behind on their payments. (Lord, is that money-grubbing or good business?) Off I went, naturally telling my parents about it.

Anyway, the people were all at home and all paid until I got to the last house, a family I will now call the Smiths, who had 17 children at the time. The number, I have been told, eventually reached 21, all their natural children, all healthy. But were they dirty! And I still feel a pang remembering how they used to run about shoeless, even in winter snows, with their skinny bodies hardly protected against the frigid elements.

I thought of these things at the door but something, a sense of justice I told myself, drove me into knocking. Mrs. Smith answered, a shot of whiskey in her hand. She greeted me heartily, thinking I had stopped by to pass on holiday greetings. She led me past the Thanksgiving board, which consisted of only a turkey sitting on a plat-

ter in the middle of a living room table with most of the 17 Smith kids battling to pull bits from it.

"Don't suppose you want to join that, do you?" Mrs. Smith asked.

"No," I said.

She took me into the kitchen where Mr. Smith was sitting with his own shot glass.

"Have a drink?" he asked.

I would like to report that I quaffed the whiskey, collected my dues and left. But instead I kind of begged off, made a shaky farewell and beat it out of there, right through the hooping and hollering mess of kids.

I got home and quickly melted into the scene of dining room table, my parents and my brothers and sisters. Still, Thanksgiving hasn't been the same since I was 12 and went out collecting my paper money.

By Carmen Viglucci

Editorial

A Special Kind of Hope

Psychiatrists know that the holiday season, for all its joy and gaiety for those in normal straits, can be likewise cruel and tension-packed for those not so well off.

And by "not well off" we do not mean just the indigent but also the sick, the very young, the abandoned elderly, the lonely, the left-outs of this whirlwind society which unwittingly casts some of its members aside.

The annual Courier-Journal Christmas Fund, beginning this week, works through the Catholic Family Center. Its main purpose, of course, is to raise funds to help the needy at Christmas-time. With your help, toys will be bought, and dinners provided, and heat bills paid, and clothing given.

True, handouts are often criticized. Be that as it may, it is difficult at this

special time of the year to say no to a hungry child, or a worried, sick mother, or a crippled father.

The fund, however, does more than this. It may provide training for someone fighting alcoholism, repairs for an old woman's home, vocational courses.

Even with all that, the fund does more. It reminds the lonely, the poor, the forgotten of the special significance of the Christmas season. That there also is love.

Through helping in material ways we may perhaps kindle the light of hope for those who do not know it exists.

By beginning in Thanksgiving, we are starting the fourth annual Courier-Journal Christmas Fund earlier than ever.

We have learned from earlier funds that Christmas has a way of arriving quicker than even careful planners sense. Many times the opportunity to help has passed amid the whirl of our own busy and happy activities.

A special reason this year is that part of the collection will go to those families victimized by the floods in the Southern Tier. Case histories, similar to those provided by the Catholic Family Center, also will be provided by flood relief workers, still on the job fulltime in the Elmira-Corning area.

So the fund has more purpose this year than any of the previous years. We hope you will respond to the Courier-Journal appeal and help alleviate the loneliness and misery many of our brothers feel even more sharply at this time of the year.