

COLUMNISTS

Holiday reminds us to say thanks

One of the first things little children learn to say after they begin to talk is, "Thank you." It's usually preceded by a parent's prompting: "Now, what do you say?"

An older child or even an adult who cannot say, "Thank you," or who acts as if whatever they receive is somehow owed to them is dismissed as an "ingrate." Few epithets are more cutting.

As yet another Thanksgiving holiday approaches (celebrated Oct. 12 in Canada), we are reminded once again of our abiding need to give thanks for everything that we receive from others and ultimately from God, the source of every blessing, especially the gift of life itself.

As families and friends gather around the table this holiday for the traditional turkey dinner, they will in their own way — sometimes openly and with much warmth, and sometimes awkwardly and with some hesitation — give thanks for the love and friendship that binds them together and gives meaning, support, and purpose to their lives.

Because Thanksgiving and Christmas are, in a particular way, family holidays (unlike the Fourth of July or even Easter), it is on such occasions that we feel most keenly the absence of loved ones, whether through death or distance.



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

We recall the happy times when all were together — father, mother, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles, husband and wife, sons and daughters. The empty chairs or closed-in spaces serve now as silent monuments to their memories and to the deep love that we had for them, and they for us.

But such Thanksgiving themes are religious as well as secular in character. Indeed, they are at the heart of most religious traditions, and of Catholicism in particular.

As the Second Vatican Council reminded us in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Eucharist is the summit and the source of the whole Christian life. Our coming together around the table of sacrifice in a church is but an extension of our gathering to-

gether around the dinner table in our homes. Both gatherings serve the same purpose, that of reinforcing the bonds of love that undergird our solidarity one with another.

The very word Eucharist means, in the original Greek, thanksgiving. The celebration of the Eucharist is a communal act of thanksgiving to God for all the blessings we have received, and particularly for our redemption in Jesus Christ, our new life in the Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal life in heaven beyond this one on earth.

The Eucharist is also a communal act of loving and grateful remembrance — a remembrance not only of Christ's self — sacrifice on our behalf but also of those who were once an intimate part of our lives and whose caring and nurturing sustained and guided us in our development as healthy, well-integrated human persons.

The church's doctrine of the Communion of Saints, which is so much at the heart of its understanding of the Eucharist, underscores the abiding and mutually supportive relationships that continue to exist between ourselves and those who have gone before us.

Masses celebrated on the significant dates in the lives of departed loved ones,

including especially the anniversaries of their death, are but an expression of that enduring bond that not even death itself can break.

The Thanksgiving turkey and the various foods that accompany it function like the Holy Communion received at Mass. It is a simple, uncomplicated main course that, like the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist, we have grown accustomed to associating with the family feast of Thanksgiving, and the consecrated bread and wine, with the church's own central act of thanksgiving.

The material and the spiritual food alike not only nourish and sustain us physically and interiorly, but they also strengthen and deepen our communal and familial solidarity.

At the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, we are invited to "lift up our hearts" and to "give thanks to the Lord our God," because "it is right to give God thanks and praise."

On this Thanksgiving Day, 1998, and without parental prompting, we say, "Thank you" to God and to our loved ones in the spirit of the little child who has just received a gift.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Why we honor Christ as king

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 23:35-43. (R1) 2 Samuel 5:1-3. (R2) Colossians 1:12-20.

Sunday is the feast of Christ the King. Why should we honor Christ as king? St. Paul in the second reading gives three reasons.

First, "(God) rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son" by his redemption and the forgiveness of our sins.

A Russian fable tells of two men, a wealthy man and his servant, unable to reach their destination before nightfall due to a blinding blizzard. The next morning friends searched for them and finally found the master, frozen to death, face down in the snow.

When they lifted him they found the servant — cold but alive. He survived and told how the master had voluntarily placed himself on top of the servant so the servant could live. Christ is the master who died for his servants. He is the general who made provision for his soldiers' mistakes. He is the Son of God who came to serve and to give his life for a ransom for us. He reconciled everything in his person, bringing us from the darkness of sin to the light of life.



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Second, we honor Christ as king, because "He is the image of the invisible God, ... in him everything in heaven and on earth was created."

In *Newsweek* magazine there was a story of a negligent landlord, George Carroll, who would not clean up his broken-down apartment houses. Judge George Daher of Boston sentenced Carroll to live in his own apartments to persuade him to make the necessary repairs.

Interesting story, but it pales in comparison to what God did in the Incarnation. His Son, "the image of the invisible God," emptied himself and took the form of a servant. He walked and lived in the "slums" in order to lift us up and give us the dignity of children of God. Our lives matter so much to God that his Son

— "the image of the invisible God" — laid aside his royal robes and became one of us. We are really important!

Third, we honor Christ as king, because "he is the head of the body, the church." We are the body of Christ; but he is the head, the king.

Explorer Ernest Shackleton and his party sailed for Antarctica on the very day that England declared war on Germany in World War I. At their first port of call, Shackleton wired back that he and his party were prepared to abandon their expedition. Shackleton received a one-word reply from his government: "proceed." The cable was signed by the first lord of the admiralty, Winston Churchill.

There are times when we are tempted to give up the fight against the forces of evil and injustice in this world, but word comes from our commander-in-chief: "proceed." Christ is the head of the church.

Doris Forman and her husband moved into a new house. Shortly after they moved in her husband asked her, "What about having a picture of Christ in our living room?" She was unsure, but she agreed anyway.

"We're Christians," she said. Her hus-

band hung a large picture of Christ in the living room.

In the years following many things happened to the family as a direct result of that picture. Doris said, "Total strangers began confiding in us. Others commented on the picture. All felt we knew Christ, that he was the king of our home."

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

- Monday, November 23**
Revelation 14:1-3,4-5; Luke 21:1-4
- Tuesday, November 24**
Revelation 14:14-19; Luke 21:5-11
- Wednesday, November 25**
Revelation 15:1-4; Luke 21:12-19
- Thursday, November 26**
Revelation 18:1-2,21-23; 19:1-3; Luke 21:20-28
- Friday, November 27**
Revelation 20:1-4,11-21:2; Luke 21:29-33
- Saturday, November 28**
Revelation 22:1-7; Luke 21:34-36

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