

Thanksgiving...USA
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Being Americans, our traditional approach to Thanksgiving is the turkey and everything that surrounds it—Indians, Pilgrims, and corn. This is fine and good; certainly there are traditional things to be thankful for. Unfortunately, this American approach to the notion of thanksgiving leaves us cold in the light of the absurdities which all of us face every day—the starvation—deaths of young children by the thousands in Africa, an incredibly cruel adventure in Viet Nam, and increasingly bitter racial antagonisms at home. What can an act of thanksgiving mean in the light of the continual horror humanity experiences?

For you and for me—Orthodox Christians—the supreme expression of thanksgiving—the Eucharist, as it is called—is a continual recognition of the fact that all things exist because God created them and continues to keep them going.

The act of thanksgiving puts everything—the food we eat, the joys we share, the agonies we experience—in the light of Christ. Only there are these things meaningful. They are meaningful only there because that is the normal, the real, place for them. In the light of Christ, these things can endure if they are healthy; and if they are not, they can be healed. The act of healing goes together with the act of thanksgiving. The sickness of our world, of our nation, of our own selves, can only find healing when Christ is known to be Lord of all that is, the origin of true life. And Christ is known when we thank Him—in the Eucharist, the Orthodox Thanksgiving. In your Liturgy, in your Church, you offer all things, the whole wide world, back to God—because that is where they belong. And when things are where they belong, we call them ‘normal’, and normality is what we seek.

This is all fine and good. But, what does it mean for twentieth century men and women—and teenagers—as we all search for real peace, real social justice, real racial harmony, and the relief of human suffering and misery? It means this: you and I have a place, a function, a job in God’s work in this world. That is what Orthodox mean by the word person: the instrument of God’s plan of action. He does not need us. But He has freely chosen to work with and through us. His love for people becomes real through human persons who give themselves to Him.

Somehow, we Christians are different. We are called to be the ‘salt of the earth,’ seeds of a new creation—love, harmony, peace, justice. We have been given this power by the love of God. His Incarnation and His Resurrection made this love real in our history. As his instruments, our lives define themselves by our own thanksgiving.

You are an Orthodox Christian. In a real sense that makes you a priest. What does the priest do? He celebrates the Liturgy. That means he offers everything—the cosmos—back to God. And when you are at the Liturgy, you are celebrating the offering

with him. And when we offer ourselves, our lives, our actions in the world, to God, we are extending the Liturgy of the Church into the world around us.

But this priesthood which you and I and all Orthodox share does not mean that our thanksgiving can be measured in terms of more science, more food, more civil rights, more medicine. Instead, the healing presence of Christ is made real in all human situations by our being there, living in Christ through the Eucharist of the Church. We are in the world for the life of the world that God loved so much that He gave His Son for it. That kind of Orthodox can go into the world and heal and comfort because he has been healed and comforted, he has lived in Christ, and, with all its struggles and difficulties, he made that living experience of the basis for all his dealings with and in the world.

Thanksgiving is not only a call to prayer in the Church, but it is also a call to action in the world. The Eucharist gets you involved. If Orthodox means 'right-belief,' then it cannot be separated from *Orthopraxy*—'right-action.'

Thanksgiving is a recognition that we are all called to share in Christ's world. We are the centers of God's love in the midst of all the horror, suffering, injustice, misery and hatred that poisons life on earth.

Are you and I going to be beaten by evil? Or are we going to throw ourselves into life of the world as healers? Will we cry out WHY? at all the absurdities of life, or will we identify with suffering and share the suffering as God does. That is the choice: to say why, or to sit with the sufferer and comfort him.

That way is clear. It is the way God chose to deal with us. It is the only way. It is the way of the Cross—but also the way of Resurrection. It is the way of self-denial--but also the only way of self-affirmation. It is the way of losing yourself—but also the way of finding the self. It is the Christian way. It is the answer to the immediate urgent needs to all. It is the only answer we can give. It is the answer God gave us. He gave us Himself. We—you and I and all Orthodox—are to give our selves.