

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
Thanksgiving Eve
23 November 2011
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita
Lk 17:11-19

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Is Thanksgiving an American Holiday, or a Church Holy-day?

To which calendar does it belong?

There are two distinct calendars that guide our lives as Christians:
One hangs on your wall at work, or your fridge at home.

It tells you

when your kid has soccer practice and gymnastics,
when you need to make a meal for Confirmation class, or go to the doctor's,
and which days of the week you've got your evenings filled with meetings.

This calendar runs January to December, Sunday to Saturday,
and has special days marked aside:

Independence Day, Valentine's Day,
Memorial Day, Veteran's Day,
and even some Presidents' Birthdays.

The other calendar is the Church Year—

It tells you the story of Christ and His love for you, year in and year out.

It runs from Advent to Pentecost,
with the long Green season which came to an end last Sunday.

It too has special days marked aside, days like:

Christmas and Easter,
Epiphany, the Ascension,
and various Saints Days.

They're two different calendars, but sometimes they seem to overlap a bit.

For instance, you might get some time off work on Christmas and Easter—

holy days for the Church,
but recognized by the American calendar as special, too.

And so, what do you do with Thanksgiving?

To which calendar does it belong—Church, or State?

Well, today I guess the Church says, "Yes! Both."

While it's clearly a secular holiday—

known best for Turkey, over-eating, and football—
the name itself is a word of the Church:

Thanksgiving, or in the original Greek: *Eucharistia!*

Thanksgiving, *Eucharistia*, is what Jesus did over the Cup on the night when He was betrayed, giving the Church His very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

That's why we sometimes call our celebration of the Lord's Supper, the *Eucharist!*

Thanksgiving, or *Eucharistia*, is also what Jesus did over the loaves and fish, feeding the 4,000.

And Thanksgiving, or *Eucharistia*, is what today's last leper did, falling on his face before Jesus.

And so it seems *Thanksgiving* is central to the life of Christ and those who run into His mercy— those who encounter His miraculous feeding, His undeserved healing, His gifts— who can help but to *give thanks?*

And so, while the holiday rightly belongs to the State— falling on the fourth Thursday of November every year— the Church can't help but to take part and give thanks.

In fact, it's *only* in the Church that Thanksgiving can properly be done!

Why is that?

Well it's got to do with what the Church is— the Church is the gathering of saints, believers, around the preaching of the Gospel and the giving out of the Sacraments.

In other words, the Church is the gathering of the faithful around Jesus.

And while Church happens here at Grace regularly, it happened also in today's Gospel reading, when the Samaritan leper saw that he was healed, turned back, and fell on his face at Jesus' feet, *giving Him thanks!* (Lk 17:16)

Any Thanksgiving apart from Jesus is a misdirected Thanksgiving.

And while our State certainly has much to be thankful for— a good land and good crops, a good military and good protection, safety and health and prosperity beyond anything we deserve— if we give thanks to anyone but God through Jesus Christ, His Son, we miss the point.

Thanksgiving is a holiday built into the secular calendar.

And if the Church doesn't claim it as its own, then Thanksgiving will never be more than Turkey, stuffing, and football.

It'll give families a desire to give thanks, but they'll not know whom to thank.

And so the Church must step in, she must teach, she must proclaim the Christ to whom all thanks are due!

And that's what the Church Year is for—
telling the story of Jesus!

It's in the Church we hear of God's mercy on us sinners.
It's to us, who suffer from something far worse than leprosy, that our Lord stretches forth His hand of healing.

In our brokenness and misery, the heavenly Father sent His Son to earth in order to take all our pain on Himself.

He sent Jesus to die in our place, to suffer our judgment, to endure the curse of the Law *for us*.

And just as that Samaritan leper didn't deserve such a miraculous healing,
just as he was beyond repair and unable to turn himself around,
so also has this Jesus come to us, to save us.

So as you gather with family and friends tomorrow to eat your turkeys, watch your football, and fall asleep on your favorite sofa,
do it all with thanksgiving, *Eucharistia*, to the God who sent His Son *for you*.

And after giving *thanks* with the State for the many gifts we receive here on earth,
come quickly to this altar, and gather with this Church, to receive the very body and blood of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ,
the *Eucharist*, where our sins are forgiven.

And with the forgiveness of sins, come life and salvation.

Surely we have much to be thankful for, both in this world and the next!

So let us bless the Lord,
thanks be to God!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit