

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
Thanksgiving Eve
24 November 2010
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Deut 8:1-10

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

Thanksgiving, as you all know, celebrates the new land and the fruits of the land—
it's a Harvest festival.

It's a time when, traditionally, Pilgrims and Indians sit down at a meal and give thanks to God.

They thank Him for food and fellowship,
land and safety,
life and salvation.

While the holiday has become a bit commercialized—
Turkey Day, as it's sometimes called,
a day of football, over-eating, and family—
it's nevertheless a time of thanks.

Even unbelievers know they've got something to be thankful for—
who they thank, though, I don't know.
I suppose they thank themselves for having such an ability to earn the money to
pay for the meal;
they thank themselves for such intelligence as to pick the right wife, family, and
friends.
They thank themselves for providing for their needs, defending themselves, and
for not being as poor off as others they know.

Now, this sounds a bit silly—but really, *who* do they thank?
Any god apart from the God revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
is no god at all, and not worthy of any thanks.
And so they might as well thank themselves!

Our Old Testament reading is quite clear as to *whom* we should offer thanks:
Yahweh, the God of Israel, *our God*.

Yahweh promised you the good land (Deut 8:1);
Yahweh led you 40 years through the wilderness (8:2);
Yahweh did not let your clothes wear out or let your feet swell (8:4);
Yahweh humbled you, tested you, made you hunger, and fed you with Manna (8:3);
Yahweh gave you to know that *Man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that comes
from the mouth of Yahweh* (8:3).
And Yahweh is bringing you into a good land (8:7).

Just as our picture of the first Thanksgiving is probably a little romanticized
(I doubt it went so well as we teach our young kids in school)—
So also would we be mistaken to think Israel had it easy entering the Promised Land.

Their road was filled with obstacles:

hunger, thirst, jealousy, rage, hatred, and idolatry.
 they constructed a golden calf and called it Yahweh (Exod 32:4-5);
 they grumbled against Yahweh because they were hungry (Exod 16:2);
 they cursed Yahweh because they were thirsty (Exod 17:2);
 and they were quick to forget their blessings (Deut 8:14-17)—
 blessings of deliverance, redemption, forgiveness, life, freedom, and joy!
 They were quick to forget Yahweh.

Our reading says that Yahweh *humbles* and *tests* you

“in order to know what is in your heart—
 whether you’ll keep His commandments, or not” (Deut 8:2).

He gives you what you don’t *know*,

what you can’t explain or understand or make sense of,
 so that you may *know* Him (Deut 8:3).

He tests and tries you, giving you sickness and pain, discipline, hunger, and disaster,

so that you quit relying on what you *know*,
 what you can explain or make sense of,
 and trust Him, living by what comes from Him,
 even when it doesn’t seem like it’ll work.

Thanksgiving is the recognition of countless blessings,

even blessings we can’t explain or make sense of,
 like illness, back pain, whiney children, and death—
 and blessings that really shouldn’t be, that we don’t deserve,
 like a house and home, food and drink, wife and children.

But Thanksgiving is no good if we don’t know who to thank.

It’s a bit pointless if we’re simply thanking ourselves.

(We do that enough as it is!)

But to set a day aside where we remember *our Lord, Yahweh* and all that comes from Him—

turkey, stuffing, gravy, sweet potatoes, corn, bread, and Grandma’s pretzel-based-jello—
 then we’re on the right track.

But then there’s all of this promise about the good land (Deut 8:7-9)—

the land of streams of water, fountains and springs,
 the land of wheat and barley,
 of grape vines, fig trees, and pomegranates,
 of olive trees and honey,

wherein there’s no scarcity of bread or lack of anything,

and whose stones are iron and from whose hills you can dig precious metals—
 this promise isn’t actually about the land!

Plymouth, Massachusetts isn't the Promised Land—
 and, sorry to say, neither is Wichita, Kansas.
 And while we're at it, neither is Jerusalem, or Israel, Rome, or St. Louis!

The Promised Land, where blessings of life and salvation flow endlessly,
 where "you'll eat and be satisfied and you'll bless Yahweh your God" (Deut 8:10),
 is the Church.

The Church is that land where no one hungers or thirsts anymore,
 where Yahweh gives Himself to you in bread and wine,
 taking away your sins and healing your disease,
 where Yahweh washes you with the waters of holy baptism,
 giving you new life in His Son,
 where Yahweh gives you His Word, in the readings, preaching, and the absolution,
 that you would know that "Man shall not live by bread alone,
 but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4).

Thanksgiving properly belongs to the Church.
 In fact, the Greek word for thanksgiving might be familiar to you,
 It's *Eucharistia*, wherein we find "Eucharist,"
 That is, Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, the Sacrament of the Altar.
 That is truly a meal of Thanksgiving.

No, you won't find turkey or stuffing, sweet potatoes or cranberries;
 but you'll find bread and wine,
 and with it: the body and blood of Jesus—
 whose name means: "Yahweh Saves" (Mt 1:21).

This is the Church's Thanksgiving Meal—
 the meal where sinners come and dine with their crucified Lord,
 where their sins are forgiven,
 where those without family, home, or shelter are given more than they
 could ask—
 where Jesus, *Yahweh Saves*,
 is recognized as God and the source of all blessings.

His blessings come without our knowing or understanding.
 They might not always seem like a blessing at the time,
 But "we know that in *all* things, God works for the good of those who love Him"
 (Rom 8:28).

And so, as you gather around the dinner table tomorrow, remember to give thanks to Jesus,
 For delivering you from your sin,
 For leading you into the Promised Land, the Church,
 And for giving Himself to you in a meal of bread and wine.

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