

“We benefit from the reminder.”

The Danville News

Robert John Andrews

November 25, 2021

“A Graceful Life”

Word Count: 750

Back in the days when Thanksgiving Eve church services were in vogue we'd invite the congregants to write out what they were thankful for and we'd incorporate them in the evening prayers. The last Thanksgiving Eve service I officiated was in 2010. This service faded from many church calendars. I miss it. These special worship occasions always were my favorites. Thanksgiving Eve. Maundy Thursday. There was simplicity and sincerity to them that wasn't always evident in regular Sunday services or the BIG religious occasions, such as frenetic Christmas Eve. Perhaps it was because they were lightly attended. Perhaps it was because they were singular in focus. There were fewer distractions to the reason for being there.

During the Thanksgiving Eve service, offering plates would be passed through the pews. No money was expected, just prayer cards filled out. We never wanted to know who wrote what. I'd read them as we prayed, offering up the thoughts, hopes, and thanks. I confess that during the singing of the anthem I'd review them first and choose one with which to finish the prayers, usually a thanksgiving prayer written in a child's hand. A child's prayer is closer to God than any of mine.

Rarely were the prayers about things. Predominately, they were about relationships. They voiced their gratitude in their lives and the lives of love ones for a divine presence, whether mediated through their faith or the faith of others. They voiced their gratitude for healings or strength our surprising courage and wisdom in the midst of trials, for new chances after mistakes, for friendships and families, for opportunities afforded by church, community, country, even for hard times. They'd rise above the troubles and problems, personal and civic, to recognize blessings in the midst of it all. It's a freeing gift to live thankfully. It's why we call it Thanksgiving. Giving thanks. It takes a small and petty person to fail to appreciate their indebtedness. We benefit from the reminder.

What makes you thankful? There are additional questions to think about today. How do you make others thankful? How do you make that which we call God thankful? We don't often ask such questions. We should. They're more important than us reflecting on what makes us thankful. What does make God thankful? Do we live well enough, with integrity and compassion, for God to be grateful for us?

Last question: Will you begin your Thanksgiving meal by giving thanks? There's the story of the young boy who visited Thanksgiving for the first time with some family whom he had never met. They sat at table and started chomping away. The boy looked over at this uncle. “Uncle, you're just like my dog; he starts eating right away also.” Does your family offer a favorite blessing? Do you turn off the television? We share food and time. Riddle time! What must you break apart to bring a family closer together? Bread (a riddle from the book, “The Storyteller”). Graces at meal remind us this is a gift, a loan. All is borrowed. All is temporary. All is precious.

Let's appreciate how other religions – Hindu, Muslim -- offer their meal blessings. We rejoice how Thanksgiving isn't a Christian but a civil holiday. Christians don't own it.

This is the prayer Jewish Jesus would have prayed: “Baruch atoh Adonai, Eloheynu Melech Ha-Olam (Blessed are You, our God, King of the Universe), Ha-Motzee Lechem meen Ha-Aretz (who brings forth bread from the earth).”

What are some scripted prayers Christians can say, in case you’d rather not wing it?

“God is great, God is good. Let us thank God for our food. Amen.”

“Jesus be our guest today. Bless this food, dear Lord we pray. As we bow our heads and say, ‘Thank you for your love this day.’”

“Bless, O Lord, this food to our use and us to thy loving service; in Christ’s name we ask it. Amen.”

Then there’s The Selkirk Grace from Scotland: “Some hae meat and canna eat, And some wad eat that want it; But we hae meat, and we can eat, Sae let the Lord be thankit.”

A compelling grace we learnt in Nicaragua, which I’ve shared before: “Gracias Senor por el pan (Thank you Lord for bread). Y da pan a los que tienen hambre (And give bread to those who hunger). Y hambre de justicia a los que tenemos pan (And hunger for justice for those of us who have bread). Gracias Senor por el pan. Amen.”