

Lord, help all the miserable ones  
The Danville News  
Robert John Andrews  
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"Thoughtful Thanks"  
Word Count: 750

It wasn't the most exciting gift placed annually beneath the Christmas tree, but we eventually got the message. The more exciting gifts of memory included my Johnny Reb Canon, a toboggan, very cool Roy Rogers' six shooters, bags of Civil War soldiers in various fighting positions, my transistor radio, and Grandma's gift of a boxed edition of "The Lord of the Rings." There also were the predictable sweaters from mom. It took her till I was married for her to realize I never wore sweaters. Santa also stuffed our stockings with packets of white handkerchiefs. Mom had such high hopes for her little barbarians.

What was this least exciting gift under the Christmas tree? Nice stationary.

A portion of Christmas afternoon was reserved for sorting through our loot so we could write our thank you notes. Thank you, Grandma. Thank you, Unk. When was the last time you received a thank you note? When was the last time you wrote a thank you note, with a real pen?

Now, it's not as if any of us have to be polite and have manners. Yes, I continue to tease that basically what some call being woke, I consider being polite, having good manners. We really are in this thing together.

There's no law on the books that you have to say 'please,' 'thank you,' 'I'm sorry.' That's precisely the point. You may recall how British Lynn Truss' wickedly funny book, "Talk to the Hand," reminds us how an English judge and distinguished member of the British Parliament gave a speech in 1912 in which he described how the greatness of a nation resides not in its obedience to laws but in its abiding by conventions that are not obligatory. Not what you have to do, but what you choose to do. Not how you are forced to behave but how you choose to behave.

These courtesy words of 'please,' 'thank you,' and 'I'm sorry' are more than niceties, they secure the assurance of "civil reciprocity." They tell each of us that this world is reassuringly hospitable, not threatening, that we are engaged in more than a competitive struggle, forced to fight to survive. Politeness signals your willingness to meet someone halfway. These courtesy words, Truss writes, tell us we can trust each other, we rely on each other. Please. Thank you. I'm sorry.

What other tidbits does she offer for the sake of civil sanity, for not hiding indoors?

Someone else will not clean it up (so stop throwing your cigarette butt on my street!). From plane tickets, movie tickets, to banking, why are more and more companies placing the burden of doing their job on us? Criticism or disagreement isn't a form of aggression. Not everything is a personal attack. Most of it isn't personal so stop whining. You're not always right, you often are wrong. A sense of shame is necessary. Public space should be neutral and shared. It is the nuisance-makers who should be tolerant of us. You should defer to certain persons of rank, merit, distinction. It's okay to judge a person by the way they behave. You owe a debt to others – you are not self-made. We are not our own and we don't always get to do what we want to do.

You can practice her advice today around the Thanksgiving Table. If we find we can get along with family, today's society might just have a chance.

It's exciting how the origin of the word, 'thankful,' shares the same root as the verb, 'to think.' Those who take time to think tend to become thankful. Thoughts giving rise to thoughtfulness. Conversely, thoughtless people tend to become people of sparse gratitude. Just look around. Lord, help all the miserable ones.

I believe I just convinced myself to make sure on Thanksgiving Day I watch the movie, "Harvey." It's a tonic for today's madness. I love Elwood P. Dowd and his invisible six foot Pooka. Excuse me. His 6' 3 ½ inch invisible rabbit. As Elwood explains: "Well, I've wrestled with reality for 35 years, Doctor, and I'm happy to state I finally won out over it... Years ago my mother used to say to me, she'd say, 'In this world Elwood, you must be' – she always called me Elwood – 'In this world, Elwood, you must oh so smart or oh so pleasant.' Well, for years I was smart. I recommend pleasant. You may quote me"

Have a blessed Thanksgiving, and, by the way, thank you.