



# PIER REVIEW

THE MINISTRY JOURNAL OF THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. LUKE, ORLANDO, FLORIDA

## Half Empty or Half Full?

By The Rev. Canon J. Gary L'Hommedieu

**I** PREACH THE SAME SERMON EVERY YEAR AT THE morning service on Thanksgiving Day. People are very patient with me. Perhaps the message is so forgettable that they think they're hearing something new. Or perhaps there are some, like me, who need to hear the message over because, like me, they are faced every year with the same spiritual challenge.

Year after year Thanksgiving confronts me with the challenge of giving thanks.

The American feast of Thanksgiving has deep Christian, even Hebrew, roots, which form the core of the American cultural spirit. It is the spirit of giving thanks to God for blessings in the face of danger and privation, and later in the midst of opulence and plenty.

The American experiment was a welcome change in the lives of our Founders and the millions who flooded these shores after them. The promise of a second chance in a new world is a story literally of Biblical proportions. It is the Christian story, which unfolded in stark reality on the shores of the North American continent borrowing a name from the Old Testament—the name of Liberty.

Here's my sermon, which I believe is richly theological and also consistent with our American holiday. Our Founders learned in the midst of trials the lesson of giving thanks, a lesson too easily forgotten by us who take their struggles for granted. The lesson is simply this: that all things belong to God, who gives bountifully to all. There is nothing that originates with us. There is nothing of our own we can either give to or withhold from God.

Nothing except our thanks. It is the one product of our hearts. It's all we have, and it's all we have to give.

This truth is embedded in the ritual sacrifice we call Eucharist, a Greek word that literally means "thanksgiving". Week by week we make the offering of our thanks, that is, of *ourselves*. God transforms our gift into Himself, gives it back to us, and we receive ourselves as new persons.

Giving thanks does not come naturally, and it comes more easily to some than to others. It does not come easily to me. I must labor and seek God's grace to give a measly portion of this trifling gift. This grace He gives bountifully, reminding me time after time that in giving I receive still more. I receive Him.

I guess I'm a "glass half empty" kind of guy, even as a Christian. I don't understand the reason for this. I hope it's "just" a personality quirk. But I know there are others like me who need to be reminded, year by year, if not hour by hour, to give back to God that one seeming trifle—our heartfelt thanks.

While this tiresome sermon is mostly for me and perhaps a few others, the rest of this special Thanks-Giving *Pier Review* is for all of you. May God be the gift and the giver in all your celebrations this holiday season. **PR**

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Half Empty or Half Full? .....	page 1
Not Just a Pilgrim Thing .....	page 2
The Discipline of Giving Thanks .....	page 3
The Sacrament of Thanksgiving .....	page 4
We Gather Together .....	page 6
Give Thanks for Everything .....	page 7
The Great Thanksgiving (BCP).....	page 8



From the Dean's office "Together Again in the New World", featuring the pilgrim nuclear family astride the local parish church and priest. (Publix Pilgrim figures courtesy of Publix Super Markets.) Try to forget that the pilgrims left England to get away from churches and priests, among other things.

# Not Just a Pilgrim Thing

By The Very Rev. Anthony P. Clark

Offering thanks  
to God for life's  
many blessings  
did not begin  
with the Pilgrims.

“AND THE LORD SAID TO MOSES, ‘On the first day of the Festival of Shelters, after you have harvested all the produce of the land, you will begin to celebrate this seven-day festival to the LORD.... This is a permanent law for you, and it must be kept by all future generations. During the seven festival days, all of you who are Israelites by birth must live in shelters. This will remind each new generation of Israelites that their ancestors had to live in shelters when I rescued them from the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God.’” (Lev. 23:33, 41-43 NLT)

Thanksgiving Day in modern America focuses on parades, football and turkey with all the trimmings. The “Publix Pilgrims,” yearly guests at our Thanksgiving Day feast, help us by serving the meal and reminding us of the American roots of Thanksgiving Day at Plymouth, Massachusetts.

While that first Thanksgiving Day in 1623, established by Colonial Governor William Bradford, certainly included a feast of the New England bounty (and perhaps some sport!), the primary focus of the day was thanksgiving to God. As Bradford declared,

“All ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, [shall] gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday, November 29th, of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty-three and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings.”

Offering thanks to God for life's many blessings, however, did not begin with the Pilgrims. The example of ancient Israel likely influenced their intentional designation of a time to offer thanks to God. One such example from ancient Israel was *Sukkot*: the Festival of Shelters, Booths, or Tabernacles. According to Kevin Howard and Marvin Rosenthal in *The Feasts of the Lord: God's Prophetic Calendar from Calvary to the Kingdom*, Sukkot “was to be an annual reminder of God's provision during the forty-year wilderness sojourn when Israel had lived in similar shelters.... The feast was twofold, for it commemorated God's past goodness and provision during their wilderness sojourn, and it commemorated God's present goodness and provision with the completion of the harvest” (p. 135).

As your family and friends gather around the Thanksgiving table after the parades and between the football games, pause a moment and reflect on the history of Thanksgiving Day. Give the Plymouth Pilgrims their due for offering thanks to God in such an intentional way. But more importantly, recall our heritage found in ancient Israel and Sukkot. Offer thanks to God for his goodness and provision—past and present—and remember that Thanksgiving is not just a Pilgrim thing! PR

# The Discipline of Giving Thanks



Deacon Carolyn Petersen, a Diocesan trained Spiritual Director, teaches the Celebration of Discipline on Monday nights .

By The Rev. Carolyn Petersen

**C**URRENT WORLD PROBLEMS AND DIRE predictions assault us daily through the media, suggesting that Thanksgiving and Celebration are somehow irrational practices. Yet these significant spiritual disciplines are at the heart of our Christian life!

Recall that angels rejoiced when announcing God's sending His only Son to earth: God-in-the-Flesh Who came among us, sent to die for us.

David was so filled with joy and thanksgiving that he danced before the Lord, much to the disdain of his wife. David insisted, "I will celebrate before the Lord" (2 Sam. 6:21, NIV).

St. Paul, though imprisoned and suffering, was empowered by the Holy Spirit to command: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God" (Phil. 4:4,6).

Jesus began his public ministry by proclaiming not only his calling but also the Year of Jubilee in Luke 4:18,19: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Richard Foster, in his classic book, *Celebration of Discipline*, suggests that we are called to a perpetual jubilee of the Spirit (p.190). Spiritual disciplines are practices which, when adhered to faithfully, can cause us to become transformed—more Christ-like—liberating us from our inherent slavery to self and sin. Foster maintains that the Discipline of Celebration is at the core of the Transformational Disciplines, bringing joy

into our lives which empowers us with incentive and strength. "The joy of the Lord is my strength" (Neh. 8:10). Celebration includes corporate actions which orient us toward worship, praise and thanksgiving; delighting in the Lord and his people, having a mentality of abundance, sharing, spending time with family and friends, displaying humor and pursuing personal creativity.

The Lord desires to transform us. St. Paul suggests that we be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). Such transformation occurs through the study of God's word and through faithful engagement in additional spiritual practices, which mold and form us into His image.

The spiritual discipline of Celebration can be incorporated throughout the day, infusing a constant dose of joy and strength into our lives! This Celebration of Life soon becomes habitual, reinforced by the joy of the Lord and His Presence. Everything we attempt becomes not a dreaded task to accomplish but rather something done with rejoicing for the glory of God!

Letting go of our desires and returning to the Lord through practicing His presence and celebrating Him reunites us to our "first love", Jesus Christ, the Lord of our lives (Rev. 2:4).

By obediently celebrating Him with thanksgiving, our lives are empowered! Let us begin our holiday season by making Celebration and Thanksgiving joyful parts of our spiritual practices. Celebration will keep worldly distractions at bay, enabling us to live our lives centered in Christ. Hallelujah!

"A Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot."  
(St. Augustine) PR

**Letting go of our desires and returning to the Lord through practicing His presence and celebrating Him reunites us to our "first love"...**



**The Blue Ridge Cathedral comes into view as worshippers gear up for Sunday morning. This will be Bill and Christine's permanent church home beginning in 2010.**

*“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood...”*

# The Sacrament

**M**OST THANKSGIVING DAYS ARE joyful as we gather around a table with family and friends for a feast with turkey and all the trimmings. But once in a while circumstances force us to miss out on it, due to illness, travel, financial constraints, military or employment obligations. That is when we find out just how much Thanksgiving means to us.

I recently discovered that the same thing is true for our liturgical Thanksgiving, the Eucharist, which is a Greek word that means “thanksgiving”. Bill and I were in North Carolina for 11 weeks recently without benefit of the regular services of the Church. When we returned to Orlando I realized I was starving for Holy Communion.

The reason we missed the Eucharist week after week was that the Lord had another surprising call on our Sunday mornings. We were enjoying our first summer in our motorhome, staying in a lovely RV resort in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains. A month or so into our stay, the word got out that I was an ordained minister, and we were asked to lead Sunday services for our neighbors and visitors staying in the motorhome community.

After recovering from the shock of the request, and after prayerful consideration, we agreed. We began to lead a modified version of Morning Prayer for our small but enthusiastic congregation, which was

itself a coat of many denominational colors. We gathered in the community tent, which we transformed each week from the Saturday night social hall into our Sunday morning sanctuary. No stained glass windows, but our Creator gave us His version: a beautiful view of the mountains. To our humble delight, the Lord did some amazing things through the prayers, music and sermons. It was a richly blessed season, with the promise of more to come next year.

But there was no Eucharist. Although the congregation was eligible to receive it as baptized Christians, I as a deacon could not consecrate the bread and wine. The people, who were not accustomed to weekly Eucharist as we were, expressed hearty satisfaction with the generous servings of prayer and scripture and a side dish of exposition. But as the weeks went by, I became acutely aware of how much I missed the Sacrament.

At first this hunger took me by surprise. I did not expect to miss the Eucharist, especially with the undeniable satisfaction of feeding God’s hungry sheep from His holy Word. But gradually I realized that the worship still seemed incomplete. I began to ponder why I felt that way, and the wonderment increased.

Obviously rustic, outdoor worship was a huge departure from our extraordinary Cathedral Sunday service! Instead of a century-old Gothic church, we had a plastic tent. Instead of the voices of a trained choir buoyed by fine instruments in the hands of many talented musicians, we had one strong voice and a single

**Christine Maddux and Jan Weaver smile for the camera after worship.**



...abide in me, and I in them.” John 6:56

# of Thanksgiving

By The Rev. Christine L. Maddux

guitar. Instead of a large, stately altar party processing in fine vestments, we had a single deacon in street clericals standing up front. Instead of fragrant incense we had un-climate-controlled fresh air, with the occasional hint of diesel fuel. As much as I missed all the beautiful aspects of our Cathedral liturgy, none of those missing pieces gnawed at me. It was the family meal at the Lord’s Table that was missing. It was like missing Thanksgiving Dinner.

And it’s no wonder: the *Book of Common Prayer* liturgy of Holy Communion begins with The Great Thanksgiving. In Rite II the celebrant leads, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” And the people respond, “It is right to give him thanks and praise.”

The rubrics (directions on how the ceremony is to be conducted) then call for the celebrant to face the Holy Table and pray, “It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.” This is the thankful attitude we bring to the Eucharist, remembering our blessings and most especially the gift of salvation made possible through Christ’s death and resurrection. We partake of the real presence of Jesus through the bread and the communal cup. Not surprisingly, a chalice bearer will often administer the sacrament to someone kneeling at the communion rail with tears of thankfulness in their eyes.

As I reflected on missing the Eucharist, I realized that the physicality of the Sacrament was key. The “outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace” (Catechism definition of a sacrament, *Book of Common Prayer* p. 857) is an expression of Christ’s Incarnation feeding our own humanity. I could pray Morning Prayer, sensing the body of believers in the tent and around the



**Joy Weaver (left), a retired gospel singer and recording musician, forms a choir of one leading congregational singing as Deacon Christine Maddux (right) looks across the pulpit from the folding sedilia.**

world, but I couldn’t ingest the Body of Christ himself, nor drink his blood. I couldn’t give thanks for his Sacrament fueling my own body. My hunger could not be satisfied by words alone.

Many Episcopalians can recall the time when Holy Eucharist was not a part of weekly Sunday worship. I cannot, not because I am not old enough, but because I came to the Episcopal Church in 1991 from a Roman Catholic upbringing, where my Sundays in church always included Holy Communion. I discovered this summer just how deeply the habit of receiving is ingrained in my spirituality and how thankful I am for the Church’s Sacrament of Thanksgiving. I will carry this reawakened appreciation forward as we shoulder the Lord’s latest version of our marching orders: a permanent move to North Carolina.

Bill and I have very distinctly been called to “head for the hills,” to lead our fledgling congregation as the Lord wills. We have committed to leading services in the tent for next year’s season from May through October. We will spend the off-season planning for Bible studies, scouting for mission connections, keeping in touch with our little congregation (spread out all over the country during the winter), and fervently listening for God’s next instructions in this unexpected, exciting and uncharted territory. I cannot imagine doing all that without the sustenance I find at the Lord’s Table.

“If baptism charts the course for our journey, then the Eucharist provides nourishment for the journey.”  
(David A. deSilva, *Sacramental Life*) PR



Bea Wilder, the Diocesan Historiographer and Cathedral librarian, who recently turned 99, is herself a treasured bit of local history.

# We Gather Together

By Beatrice Wilder

“WE GATHER TOGETHER TO ASK THE Lord’s blessing...” (Hymnal 1982, #433), This is a familiar hymn sung in many churches that hold Thanksgiving Day services. In the *Book of Common Prayer* and in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* our two national holidays—Independence Day and Thanksgiving Day are observed as Feast Days with appropriate liturgies provided.

In the flurry of activity, turmoil and haste which nowadays characterize so much of our preparation for the Thanksgiving holiday, we tend to forget—indeed, if we ever even give it a thought—that Thanksgiving Day was originally a religious occasion, followed by a feast. It is hardly surprising that the explorers and settlers, who centuries ago landed on our shores after months of hardship at sea, would fall on their knees and thank God for having brought them into safe harbor.

That the Thanksgiving holiday comes in late fall continues its association, almost since time began, with the harvest festivals of antiquity that were common to many religions. Tabernacles, also known as *Succot* or the Feast of Booths, was just such a festival observed by the Jews in biblical times and continues down to the present day. For those who could make the journey it took the form of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem so they could worship in the Temple.

The journey today is somewhat different. “Over the river and through the woods to grandmother’s house we go” is no longer relevant for most people. Not many of us still live in the house in which we were born or even in our native city. But we still want to be with grandma and our kin on Thanksgiving Day. Hence the

frenzied activity of a people in perpetual motion—going everywhere except to church.

Thanksgiving is usually associated with the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock in 1621, but actually Florida predates their 1621 observance by 56 years. In 1565 settlers in St. Augustine celebrated Mass followed by feasting with the Indians.

During the colonial period and in the first days of our nationhood it was customary for governors or other appropriate officials to call for a special day of prayer and thanksgiving. Preserved among the nation’s historic documents is the proclamation President George Washington issued designating November 26, 1789 a national day of thanksgiving. (A coincidence—our celebration this year is on that day!) It was to be “devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be.... We may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions, to enable us all, whether in public or private stations to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually, to render our national government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just and constitutional laws...”

In 1863 President Lincoln also proclaimed the last Thursday of November a national day of thanksgiving “to offer Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.” Since that time it has become customary for all our presidents to issue a Thanksgiving Day proclamation and in 1941 Congress made the day a legal holiday.

PR

# Give Thanks For Everything

By Jesse Lassiter



Jesse Lassiter is an economics major in the business college at the University of Florida. He is a resident of Ormand Beach and a lifelong member of the Cathedral through friendships cultivated when his family lived in Orlando during the first eight years of his life.

**W**HEN LIFE THROWS YOU CURVE BALLS, be thankful for baseball.

A few weeks ago events took place in my life that led to what I call grief. I describe it as a feeling that the status quo has plummeted so far through the floor that life as I thought I knew it seemed to go along with it. Some mutation of what was once bearable un.masks itself as the new status quo and now it is time to live through it. After leaning on certain individuals to help me cope, one told me about a particular Orthodox Jewish practice—give thanks for everything.

It is difficult for me to concentrate on the task at hand when I am burdened by something that flies in the face of the present, like grief. I have a hard time coming into a state of mind that serves as the source for proper behavior as a Christian. I have found that I need to “beat” my brain in order to accomplish the goals that God has set before me. The only way I have found so far to bypass my brain and change my mood immediately, letting me do God’s will, is to be thankful for everything, one thing at a time.

I start halfheartedly going through the motions, and slowly I begin believing the words that come out of my mouth. “I am thankful for the carpet under my feet—yes, yes I know it’s just a carpet, woopti-doo!. I am thankful for my roommate, Shea, making me dinner last night—yeah, that was really nice of him. I need to show him how thankful I really am.” I continue this prayer thanking God for the most important things in my life: my family, friends, safety, the

list goes on. A transformation takes place and suddenly and unexpectedly I become the person God wants me to be for a brief moment.

It is this moment that drives me to show my roommate how thankful I am, where thoughts give birth to actions which, in turn, give birth to that “fruit” Jesus so often talked about. I plan my day after these moments and set into place goals that I have come to believe are Godly. This heavenly agenda supersedes my earthly one, and through God’s work my earthly agenda usually ends up with better results than if I had not been thankful. But more importantly, I am renouncing my will and doing His, an extremely hard thing for me to do and impossible if were I not thankful.

Giving thanks is the fundamental beginning to any task. Before a storeowner opens his store in the morning, he does an inventory check. If he fails to check every little item he has been selling lately, he will not stay in business long. Similarly, I must do my own inventory check before I can start any Godly action or I will be going into the world unprepared. A grieving, unprepared person wandering around will only fall further from God. The path to any place worth going always starts with being thankful. PR

Jesse and the “usual suspects” at a 2008 reunion in Chicago: r. to l., Jesse, Ian L’Hommedieu, Bryan Hardy, and Matt Vanture.



**"A Christian should  
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head to foot."**

See page 3 inside.

**"Thanksgiving is  
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See page 6 inside.

**pier** \pîr\ *n.*

1. *Architecture* Any of various vertical supporting structures, especially:
  - a. A pillar supporting an arch or roof.
  - b. The portion of a wall between windows, doors, or other openings.
  - c. A reinforcing structure that projects from a wall; a buttress.
2. *Literature* The monthly ministry journal of The Cathedral Church of St. Luke, Orlando, Florida.
  - a. Editor/Designer  
The Rev. Canon J. Gary L'Hommedieu
  - b. Contributing Writers  
The Rev. Christine L. Maddux  
The Rev. Carolyn Petersen
  - c. Proof Reader  
Theo Gordon
  - d. Original Photographs  
The Rev. Canon J. Gary L'Hommedieu  
William Maddux

*A General Thanksgiving*

**A**LMIGHTY God, Father of all mercies, we, thine unworthy servants, do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men [\* *particularly to those who desire now to offer up their praises and thanksgivings for thy late mercies vouchsafed unto them.*] We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful; and that we show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

— *The Book of Common Prayer, 1928*