

Thanksgiving

Each year America has a holiday in November that has taken on almost a religious reverence which we call Thanksgiving. We give this holiday so much honor that it ranks with us along with Christmas and Easter as an important holiday in the hearts of family and as a nation. But this holiday, so rich with tradition, has its origins in the earliest days of the founding of this nation.

The early years of the explorers to come to the American continent were difficult ones indeed. Those explorers, we now call The Pilgrims, faced harsh weather, unpredictable relations with the natives, disease and other challenges as they carved out homes from the wilderness they found here. Because their earliest homestead were in the northeast, the winters were harsh and their ability to build houses that could keep them warm and to find sufficient food was a constant worry to the men and women trying to raise families in America.

So anytime they received help from the native population, it was viewed as a gift from God and accepted with the greatest of joy and celebration. A Native American chief by the name of Squanto saw the plight of these new neighbors and saw to it his tribe helped these young families to survive. Besides providing food and wisdom about how to build structures that could keep them safe in the winter, Squanto taught them to fish, how to prepare eel and other strange sea creatures they harvested and how to farm.

This act of friendship was the origin of our revered holiday of Thanksgiving. The Virginia Colony established the tradition of holding a day of collective prayers of thanksgiving, and that tradition continues today. Except it is not just a day of thanksgiving for the kindness and generosity of Squanto to our forefathers. We take advantage of this day of reverence and thanksgiving to be grateful for all the good things that God has blessed this nation with.

The foods we use to celebrate Thanksgiving were ones that the pilgrim travelers found native to this country and the foods that, with the help of Native American teachers, they learned to capture, harvest and prepare to feed their families and prosper in their new home. Turkey was a game fowl that was in ample supply to the pilgrims once Squanto showed them how to hunt the bird with reliable success.

The vegetables we love to have on our traditional menus also had their origins in the early lives of the pilgrims. Potatoes, cranberries, sweet potatoes, green beans and all the rest were vegetables that the pilgrims had to learn to harvest, farm and prepare from natives of the land. So in many ways, our modern holiday, despite the dominance of football games and the upcoming Christmas holiday, retains the atmosphere of those early celebrations.

And the meaning of the holiday, despite commercialization, has been retained. Americans have much to be thankful for. The abundance of the land, the health of the most prosperous economy on earth and a society that is free and able to encourage freedom in other cultures are just a few of the things we celebrate at

this holiday time. But for most of us, it is a time to gather family and friends near and be thankful to God for our health, for the blessings of jobs and for the privilege all Americans share to be able to live in the greatest nation on earth where opportunity is ample that any of us can make it and do well if we work hard at our chosen area of expertise. And these are things truly worthy of giving thanks for.

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