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A Thanksgiving Reflection **by the Rev. Philip Wainwright**

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There are two Thanksgiving holidays in my life that have made a profound impression on me.

The first one was my first ever Thanksgiving Holiday, which I experienced during my late twenties having emigrated to the US from England. Having just recovered from the shock of experiencing Halloween for the first time (now ‘celebrated’, if that’s the right word, as much in England as here, but then a real novelty to me), all of a sudden everyone was talking about turkeys and feasting and getting together with family and friends instead of going to work! And the family with whom I celebrated my first Thanksgiving was particularly keen to make sure I knew that it meant giving thanks for all those things that Americans enjoyed simply because they were American, things which those who weren’t American could only dream about, which gave me a lot to think about—but wisely I kept most of those thoughts to myself.



But once the day came, I fell in love with it. It had everything that was great about Christmas—the break from work, the great food, the sense of celebration, time to relax and enjoy the company of family and friends—with none of the things that make Christmas a pain in the neck, especially having to go shopping and *buy* everyone something. It was true that at Thanksgiving I wouldn’t *get* any presents either, but when you’re in your twenties people no longer get you anything that excites you very much, so that didn’t matter. From that first time on, it was my favorite holiday.

The second Thanksgiving to make a real impression came six or seven years later, after I became a Christian. It was probably the second Thanksgiving after my conversion, because by the time it came I was becoming familiar enough with church services to notice that in the Episcopal Church, which I had begun to attend regularly, it was actually a church day. The church I attended had a Thanksgiving service in the morning, and during it I discovered that the Prayer Book made special provision for it. It was listed in the church calendar, just like Christmas and Easter, and had its own Scripture readings and its own Collect of the Day. It wasn’t just a day for Americans to be grateful they’re not English or Russian or Chinese, it was a day for Episcopalians to worship God, and, I discovered as I read the Scriptures, for Christians to be grateful to God for all that He had done and still does for them. It was no longer a holiday for Americans, it was now my own holy day.

And the more I read the Bible, the more I realized just how important thanksgiving is to any serious Christian.

You can't read Paul's letters without seeing it: he never stops thanking God himself and urging his fellow Christians to be as thankful to God as he is. Thanks, thanksgiving, thankfulness—over and over he points out how good God has been to us, and how gratitude is bound to flow from anyone who wakes up to that fact:

- Colossians 2:6-7 *as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. **Abounding in it!***
- Ephesians 5:18–20 *be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Always, and for everything!***
- I Thessalonians 5:16–18 *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances. **In all circumstances!***

To be a Christian is to be a person of thanksgiving. Christianity and thanksgiving go together like turkey and gravy— one is a distillation of the other.

How thankful I am, over forty years later, for another Thanksgiving, another opportunity to say publicly how good God is, how faithful, how generous, how filled with love for every one of us! Even Christmas is no longer a pain in the neck—it's become a holy day of my own, too, and I enjoy shopping for gifts for others more and more every year. There simply is no end to God's goodness, and I'm so happy to know that there will never be an end to Thanksgiving, that having come to know Christ as Lord, I will abound in it more and more and more, for ever.

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Born in Warwickshire and raised in London, England, the Rev. Philip Wainwright currently serves as Priest Associate at Trinity Cathedral. Fr. Wainwright previously served as Rector of St. Peter's, Brentwood.

