

**Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
for Thanksgiving Day
San Jose Catholic Church in Jacksonville, Florida
November 26, 2020**

Texts: Sir. 50, 22-24; 1 Cor 1, 3-8; Lk 17, 11-19

Today, faith and country are one. Thanksgiving is an American feast. Today, it is a beautiful American day, a family day. Even the best advice from the Center of Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention could not successfully contain the sense of the people to join family and gather, and have a meal together, for this is what you do on the 4th Thursday of November of every year in these United States of America!

In the last few years, I became aware of how religious is the DNA of this country. How in 1777, the Continental Congress declared a Thanksgiving holiday “to acknowledge with gratitude their obligation to Almighty God for benefits received and implore farther blessings...” and two years after the signing of the Constitution of the United States, on September 28, 1780, Congress formally asked President George Washington to name a national day of thanksgiving. It was to be observed as a day of prayer “acknowledging, with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially for affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a Constitution of government for their safety and happiness.” Almost a century later, President Lincoln declared not one but two Thanksgiving celebrations for the purpose of having “a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwellest in the Heavens.” Indeed, Thanksgiving is in the DNA of this great country! Let not the current trend of secularization wipe out these Christian roots of this beautiful nation.

Every parent teaches the child to say “thank you” in receiving a favor from others. We may have a lot of possessions but if we are not grateful, we simply are not happy. Gratitude is a quality of a good heart. It is an awareness of blessings received. It is the conscious acknowledgment that we are loved and that love is far greater than the negativities that have been inflicted upon us in the span of our lives. A wise heart is one who recognizes that all we have, all we have received is God’s providence, it is God’s blessings as we say in prayer, “you are Lord the source of all goodness.”

You have been busy preparing the meal, or even gathering the family scattered from afar around the table, but far more fitting it is coming here to praise the Lord, to worship the Lord with joyful hearts in a Mass because the Mass is a farewell meal, a sacrificial meal of the greatest gift there has been in the history of humankind: redemption, the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lord’s innocent love poured out for us all.

The Gospel today, the healing of the ten lepers and the act of one of the ten who returns to give thanks to Jesus reminds me of St. Ignatius of Loyola’s prayer *Suscipe*: “...whatever I have or possess, it was you who gave it to me; I restore it to you in full and I surrender it completely to the guidance of your will. Give me only love of you, together with your grace and I am rich enough and ask for nothing more.” St. Teresa of Avila echoes this sentiment: “solo Dios basta,” only God suffices.

In the Gospel story, Jesus asks a question: "...were not all ten cleansed? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Jesus' question is for us to ponder for "the other nine" is what our mission of evangelization is all about. Our task is to be concerned about the 9 who do not give thanks to Jesus. The majority who still do not acknowledge the day of the Lord to come and praise His holy Name. Those 9 who are not led to throw themselves at Jesus' feet like the foreigner did and **thank him!**

We have been called to come to this Mass today on Thanksgiving Day to thank the Lord. This Mass here at San Jose – in the year of St. Joseph, go to St Joseph! – is in continuity with the Mass celebrated on September 8, 1565, in St. Augustine. University of Florida historian, Dr. Michael Gannon claimed this one, this unique Mass was celebrated by the first Europeans to discover the First Coast of La Florida, and who together with the Apalachees, Crews, Timucians, celebrated the founding event, a Mass upon which a city was established and right after they shared a meal peacefully together. According to Dr. Gannon, this was the first celebration of thanksgiving in what is known today among us as America, more than forty years before the one at Plymouth Rock after the first harvest in 1621.

Let us give thanks today – *eucharistein*, literally in Greek, "I give thanks" – with this Eucharist, giving thanks for our country, for its democratic system, for its freedom, and especially its religious freedom; for its culture of life in all stages, for its backbone, for the good of family life, and above all, for all of God's blessings, so that we may be citizens that as the song "America the Beautiful" echoes "more than self, their country loved and mercy more than life...sweet America, you know, God done shed his grace on thee, He crowned thy good yes he did, in brotherhood...(in sisterhood) from sea to shining sea." Amen!