

Gratitude

in the times of pandemic

By Mario J. Paredes

In the United States, we are preparing ourselves, as we do every year, to celebrate the last Thursday of November, THANKSGIVING DAY. This important date for our nation comprises, fundamentally, two components: the historical and the anthropological.

The historical component of Thanksgiving refers to the first harvest that the first British pilgrims gathered after a hard winter and for which they gave thanks in 1621. It also refers to the food that, for this event and for three days, they shared with the Wampanoag people in what is today the state of Massachusetts. However, the official beginning of Thanksgiving as an official and national holiday in this Nation came much later with President Abraham Lincoln's October 1863 proclamation made during the middle of the Civil War.

Thanksgiving Day was established to commemorate and memorializes today a verifiable historical event in our past that has, for four centuries, survived into our times, giving us our American identity as a nation.

But THANKSGIVING DAY also has, very importantly, an anthropological component because it always reminds us of the ability of all human beings to open their senses and admire themselves, discover a loving and transcendent presence in everything, GIVE THANKS, and be happy.

To be amazed, to recognize, to discover, and to be thankful is the most genuine, natural, intrinsic, spontaneous, and valid attitude a being can have when facing its creator, the mystery of its creation, and the Transcendent. But, in addition, the ability to be thankful marks the difference between the two kinds of men and women: the sad and the happy, the pessimists and the optimists, the desperate, and those who live "waiting against all hope."

A human being is sad because they cannot open their eyes and become aware of all that they are and all that they have and, therefore, they are incapable of being grateful, of giving thanks. The happy human being—on the other hand—lives in

HAPPY THANKSGIVING DAY!

the discovery, recognition, admiration, and gratitude for everything that is and everything they have, and that happens to them. Only the person who knows that they are loved is capable of giving thanks, and with that, they have reason enough to live and be happy.

But when we confront this facet of the human experience and this dimension of humanity, an inevitable question arises with this celebration of THANKSGIVING in 2020: How do we GIVE THANKS in the time of pandemic and during a time of so many difficulties endured by humanity in general and our nation in particular? How do we give thanks when we are confronted by the serious and challenging human and social consequences that the pandemic has wrought upon us all? How do we give thanks amid a national and global societal and health situation, which contradicts the very ways, customs, and traditions we celebrate—socially and as a family—with this day? What reasons do we have to give thanks?

The person who is able, as I said earlier, to be amazed, to discover, and recognize can also find reasons for gratitude even when facing the most difficult life circumstances because they discover that in the good they can be grateful and in the less good and the bad of life, profound and fundamental lessons exist that humanize us, that make us better human beings, that make sense of our daily human existence, and for which we can also give thanks and be thankful.

Facing this, while we celebrate THANKSGIVING 2020 against the backdrop of a pandemic, it seems to me that we have two tasks awaiting us: The first is that we open ourselves to being able to discover the good and essential lessons and consequences for our existence that the pandemic has delivered to us as human beings and as a nation. The second task, no less important than the first, is to be able to build, with the commitment of all, a better society and world in which we find reasons every day to be grateful for the gift of human and social existence



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