

Giving Thanks

challenges us all

by MARIO J. PAREDES



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Every year at this time, the men and women who live in this Nation and the Americans living outside these borders prepare for the celebration of THANKSGIVING DAY. Thanksgiving is a national and family holiday that commemorates and traces its historical roots to the meeting that took place, in Plymouth (Massachusetts) around 1621, between the first pilgrims or colonists to come to these lands from England and the original natives of this Nation, the Wampanoag, in which they shared food and gave thanks for their crops. Today, four hundred years later, we continue to celebrate this meeting, joining together to give thanks for all the good fortune we have received during the year. Around our tables, we share a family banquet that has turkey as the main dish.

At a high level, Thanksgiving is the day and event that we commemorate every year as our most important national holiday and when we commemorate everything that constitutes the holiday's historical origins. But, as the name itself says, this celebration also has an anthropological foundation since giving thanks is an inherent feature of humanity's way of being, living, and acting. An act of giving thanks that arises in the human being when—with senses open and awake—we can recognize the goodness in our daily lives, our environments, and everything that is, that we have, and that happens to us.

Furthermore, this characteristic of gratitude, this ability to give thanks and recognize the good and everything that is good as a gift and the gift of life, to recognize the good in others and God, is what makes happiness possible in each of us. On the contrary, when human beings cannot recognize, perceive, and receive gratitude in life, they cannot be happy.

But "GIVING THANKS" implies the existence of reasons to do so. It assumes the existence of reasons that make THANKSGIVING realistic. That is, we give thanks in the face of what is noble and good, in the face of the good and life's blessings. In other words, it is not human, intelligent, or reasonable to GIVE THANKS without reason, when it is difficult to recognize the good or goodness in our existence or in that of others, or if it does not exist at all.

So that THANKSGIVING does not become an annual farce, a mechanical and cynical fact, just another tradition, empty of meaning, truth, and significance, a national inertia, this celebration pushes us all to discover reasons to

GIVE THANKS, to ask ourselves why and if it makes sense to GIVE THANKS in the world, in society, and within our families today. May we ponder the reasons and motives that give this celebration meaning. May we ask ourselves why we are grateful this year and every year and for what reasons.

Our current reality, situation, and daily life are surrounded by difficulties. Some have a global scope, such as those that the pandemic is leaving everywhere and in all areas of life. Other difficulties are of a social or family nature. There are many international, national, social, family, and personal conflicts that afflict us. Many injustices and inequities surround us. There is much violence and many deaths that surround us and much selfishness, competition, divisions, and walls within our hearts and in our interpersonal and social relationships; selfishness that prevents the construction of a world better than the plague through which we lived.

For this reason, THANKSGIVING DAY, more than helping us to wonder about the truth and meaning of this celebration, also pushes us all to build a better personal existence and society than the one where we are living our lives. THANKSGIVING DAY calls us and challenges us to build lives, families, a society, and a world that give meaning to our THANKSGIVING, our personal and family gratitude, and our beautiful annual celebration. Our annual celebration commits us to build abundant living spaces, relationships, and realities that merit GIVING THANKS.

Therefore, I invite everyone to respect and make memories of the historical origins of our personal, family, social, and national life. I invite all of us to be able to discover reasons, not only annual but also daily, to live gratefully and be happy but, above all, I invite everyone to build, with our deeds and words, with our attitudes and aptitudes, reasons for living in permanent THANKSGIVING, so that this annual festival that brings us together and inspires us is worthwhile and gets back to its original meanings and significance.

Mario J. Paredes, CEO of SOMOS Community Care, a network of 2,500 independent physicians — most of them primary physicians — serving nearly one million of New York City's most vulnerable Medicaid patients.