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BEING THANKFUL IN 2020

Do we need a holiday to be thankful? Probably not. However, this year has been tough for so many people, and circumstances have been tremendously difficult. Even so, we all have much to be thankful for as individuals, as a state, and as a nation. Celebrating Thanksgiving is one manner of telling the world that God is bigger than our problems.

Since the first settlement, Americans continued the custom of establishing days of prayer, fasting, and thanksgiving. This could be annually or in response to significant events. Traditionally, educators and historians recognize the "first" Thanksgiving as occurring at the Plymouth colony in the autumn of 1621.

President George Washington issued a proclamation designating November 26 of that year as a national day of Thanksgiving in 1789. The purpose was to recognize the role of providence in creating the new United States and the new federal Constitution. Washington stated in the first Thanksgiving proclamation that "It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor."

Later presidents, including John Adams and James Madison, also declared days of thanksgiving. Following those actions, President Abraham Lincoln took steps to designate a more permanent observance of Thanksgiving. With few exceptions, Lincoln's example was pretty much kept by every subsequent president—until President Franklin Roosevelt. In 1941, President Roosevelt officially established the fourth Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day.

President John F. Kennedy challenged Americans to remember the true origins and reasons for Thanksgiving. He also asked Americans to give thanks to those in our past who both fought for and gave us our ideals and values. He wrote in his Thanksgiving Day Proclamation before he was assassinated, "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but to live by them." Kennedy wanted Americans to be thankful for the intrinsic things that we have. We have gifts, like hope and love, that are can only be destroyed if we allow it. Kennedy wrote, "*We recognize too that we live in a world of peril and change—and in so uncertain a time we are all the more grateful for the indestructible gifts of hope and love, which sustain us in adversity and inspire us to labor unceasingly for a more perfect community within this nation and around the earth.*" Kennedy challenged us to be mindful of those who have less than us and to strive towards a better world not just for us but for all of humanity.

President Reagan gave America eight Thanksgiving Day proclamations from 1981 through 1988. His Thanksgiving themes almost always expressed our need to show gratitude for family, friends, and good

SUMMARY

In spite of the current pandemic, Americans should be thankful for their blessings, especially their faith, family and friends.

fortune. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the founding of our nation, the principles and ideals it stands for, and the ongoing need for citizens to give back to the community and country to uphold that vision. In 1985, President Reagan eloquently reminded us, “My fellow Americans, let us keep this Thanksgiving Day sacred,” urging Americans to thank God for the “bounty and goodness of our nation.” He then added, “And as a measure of our gratitude, let us rededicate ourselves to the preservation of this: the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

Nobody can dispute the difficulty many Americans faced in 2020. Thanksgiving is just one day set aside that allows us to take a moment to reflect on the things for which we are the most grateful. This Thanksgiving we should be thankful for both the small and large blessings in our lives. And just as in years past, we should seek with grateful hearts the political, moral, and intellectual blessings that make self-government possible. However, we must recognize what is truly essential: faith, family, and friends. Embrace others and treat everybody with dignity and respect. If you want to touch the heart of God, take an interest in the things that interests God. Let God love others through you.

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