

**Thanksgiving, 2002**  
Homily of November 28, 2002  
by Fr. Brian Joyce

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I think of Thanksgiving as the most uniquely American of all our holidays. I know some would argue for the 4th of July, but most other democratic nations have similar Independence Day celebrations. The French have Bastille Day. Mexico celebrates its Cinco de Mayo, and the Irish observe the Easter Rising and Easter Rebellion.

Some other countries have minor Thanksgiving Days. They are not as big as ours, and none of them have what we have, "Turkey Day." For us, it's "Turkey Day," although that has an interesting history. You know, when they were arguing in the late 1700's what should be the national symbol and bird of the United States, Benjamin Franklin argued against the eagle. He argued for the turkey. He said, "The bald eagle is a bird of bad moral character, like those among men who live by conning and robbing. He is generally poor, and often very lousy. (I think that belongs to bugs.... I am not sure.) But the turkey is a much more respectable bird and a true original native American. So you can imagine, you know, if Benjamin Franklin had won, we would have on our buildings, we would have on the top of our flagpoles, we would have on our presidential seal, a turkey. And we would be going to the supermarket to get frozen eagle and trying to stuff it. So, I think we are glad that Ben lost.

When I think of "Turkey Day," I think of the little boy who saw his mother putting a thermometer in the turkey and said, "If it is that sick, I don't want any!"

Thanksgiving Day, most unique among our holidays, also, is in many ways, most religious because it's not about turkeys. It's about thanksgiving. We even call ourselves (We use the Greek word for thanksgiving.).... We call ourselves a "Eucharistic People," a "Thanksgiving People." And the main thing we come to do around the table of the Lord is to offer thanks at Eucharist. "Eucharist" is just a Greek word for "thanksgiving." And I almost think of Christ as smiling and saying, "Yeah. This is the feast." Because I can see Jesus saying, "When you celebrate Christmas, when you celebrate Easter, you are pointing at Me. And I came to point to our God and to give thanks to our God, and to get you to give thanks to our God, and not to be pointing at Me all the time."

So I think this is a very special, and maybe in some ways, the most religious of our feasts, certainly the most necessary. If we become an ungrateful people, that poisons our entire system. It poisons our nation. It poisons our society. If we are ungrateful, we become hostile, and we become small-minded, and we become hard-hearted. And, at its best, our nation and our people are known for being generous of spirit, being large of heart, and offering a welcome hand to the immigrant and to the refugee and the poor. The problem is that, when we get under pressure, for example, the pressure of terrorism

or the pressure of an economic downturn, I think we can slip into betraying that reputation of being large-spirited, and we can prove ourselves untrue to that. So we need the reminder of Thanksgiving. So, I want to thank our second-grader readers and those who prepared and those who will be singing with us for reminding us of God's blessing in every way and everything, and all around us. Let's thank them one more time.... (Applause)

In many ways, Jesus says, it's all about life. "I have come that you might have life, and have it in abundance. All is gift. All is precious. Everything in creation makes God present." And then He talks about the thieves that come and steal. I am going to suggest two thieves that steal thanksgiving from our hearts, and recognition of God's presence and gifts to give thanks.

The first thief I think of is being disconnected. People like Francis of Assisi said, "The heavens are telling the glory of God and all creation is proclaiming God's name," ....and we get disconnected from that. Our tradition says the primary sign and sacrament and making-presence of God is all creation. And we get disconnected from that. We disconnect ourselves from the world and we disconnect God from ourselves. We think of God as kind of an architect who designed this and went away, who is kind of an absentee landlord, who makes occasional visits. I am going to say some heresy here. I think the biggest danger and the biggest problem is miracles, because what "miracles" means, in the strict sense, is that God is just an occasional intruder and not around the rest of the time. And the truth is that our God is present to us, not in miracles and in the unusual, but in our ordinary, daily lives, in our daily breath, in the beauty around us. Our God is not a far-off, absent God who needs to be called on, who is busy and distracted with other things, whose attention we have to get. But rather, our God is as present as life itself and our Thanksgiving table reminds us that God did not set the table and leave. It is not restaurant style where God waits on us and exits, but rather life is a feast where God is the host and our companion and our friend. We have to keep the thief of disconnecting God from daily life and daily breath away.

The second thing that steals thanksgiving from our hearts is not just that we disconnect, but that we don't notice. There is so much that we don't notice. My goodness! Didn't we just celebrate Thanksgiving? Didn't we just celebrate Christmas? Wasn't it just New Year's? And here it is November already! A life goes by. We hardly notice. It's already Thanksgiving. The big shock to me was when the Big Game, Cal/Stanford, played last week, and I was reminded that "the play" (How many remember "the play"?) took place twenty years ago. I thought it was a couple of years ago. Time really flies. I was in the parish house and sharing a remark with a couple of people, all in their mid-forties I would say, which is just a "skosh" younger than I, and I made some remarks about Bob Newhart doing his routine on the telephone, Ajax Slipper Store. They didn't know who or what I was talking about. It slips by us so fast. Talk about noticing. I don't know if any of you have noticed, but I have been going bald. (Laughter!) Well, the fact is, I

didn't notice for a long time. And, one day, I looked in the mirror and I said, "She was right, but she meant something else...." My mother always told me I would come out on top, but..... We don't notice.

Here's a reminder, simple things to be thankful for, that we might notice:

I am thankful for the mess to clean up after a party because it means I have been surrounded by friends.

I am thankful for the taxes I pay because it means that I am employed.

I am thankful for the clothes that fit a little too snug because it means I have had enough to eat.

I am thankful for my shadow that watches me work because it means I am out in the sunshine.

I am thankful for a lawn that needs mowing, windows that need cleaning, gutters that need fixing because it means I have a home.

I am thankful for all the complaining I do about the government because it means we have freedom of speech.

I am thankful for the spot I find at the far end of the parking lot because it means I am capable of walking.

I am thankful for my big heating bill because it means I am warm.

(I love this one. No one look around! Don't turn behind you for this.)

I am thankful for the lady behind me in church who sings off-key because it means I can hear.

I am thankful for the piles of laundry and ironing because it means my loved-ones are nearby.

I am thankful for weariness and aching muscles at the end of the day because it means I have been productive.

I am thankful for the alarm that goes off early in the morning because it means I am alive.

We have to notice. And this Thanksgiving, let's just notice and enjoy. And let's begin to notice again, whether it is at our Thanksgiving family meal or a phone call from a family person or a friend, or just that we make it through the day. Let's give thanks for

the gift and the presence of God in our every breath.

One other thing I think we need to notice. And I was reminded of it last Sunday when Jerry was preaching, and referred to the most voiceless and defenseless in our society, and talked about the unborn and street children and immigrants. And to that you add a lot of other children: the children of the Middle East, the children of Israel, the children of Palestine, the children of Iraq, the children of homeless people, the children caught in street gangs and crossfire in our own society. I think, among other things, we have to remember the children and pray that this might be a safer world for them. Let us pray for a safer place for children, and pray for making some room for them at the table of plenty too. And our second- graders are going to remind us of that. They are going to come up now and share with us **"Calling All the Children Home," (words and music by John McCutcheon).**

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**"Calling All the Children Home,"  
(words and music by John McCutcheon)**

"John, Mary Claire, Lulu, Jeanie  
Kevin, Jeff, Patty, Nancy, Rob"

Shadows growing longer, light is growing dim  
Supper's on the table, everybody come in  
Been playing at the river and I'm tired to the bone  
She's calling all the children home.

Chorus:

Home to the table and the big, black pot  
Everybody's got enough, 'though we ain't got a lot  
No one is forgotten, no one is alone  
When she's calling all the children home

Everybody's sittin' in everybody's place  
With their fresh-scrubbed fingers and their fresh-scrubbed face  
It's quiet just a minute while sister says a grace  
Like she's calling all the children home.

Chorus

Bridge:

I could hear her voice in the middle of a crowd  
It was never too late and it was never too loud  
Smelled just like home by the time we hit the door  
There was always just enough but there was always room for more.

So, out in the desert, down by the sea  
Hear the voice calling, "Allee, allee in free!"  
From the city to the forest where the wild beasts roam  
We are calling all the children home.

#### Last Chorus:

Home to the table, home to the feast  
Where the last are first and the greatest are the least  
Where the rich will envy what the poor have got  
Everybody's got enough, 'though we ain't got a lot

No one is forgotten, no one is alone  
When we're calling all the children home  
Gathered 'round the table and the big black pot  
Everybody's got enough, 'though we ain't got a lot

No one is forgotten, no one is alone  
From the sacks in Soweto to the ice of Nome  
From Baghdad City to the streets of Rome  
When we're calling all the children home

"Moishe, Isabelle, Siphon, Kim  
Mohammed, Mikael, Red Hawk, Tim"