



Another Version of the Story: A Thanksgiving Reflection and Prayer



Call to Prayer

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls us to “ecological conversion.” He writes, “A healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change. ... This conversion calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness. First, it entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate [God’s] generosity in self-sacrifice and good works” (218-220).

As the United States celebrates the Thanksgiving holiday, we acknowledge the “errors, sins, faults and failures” that were, and continue to be, perpetrated against Native American peoples, and we pray for healing and unity to be fostered by the gratitude that motivates generous care for the earth and all people.

Opening Song

[For the Beauty of the Earth](#)

Reading

From “[The Thanksgiving Tale We Tell Is a Harmful Lie. As a Native American, I’ve Found a Better Way to Celebrate the Holiday](#),” by Sean Sherman

I was born and raised on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota in the 1970s and am a member of the Oglala Lakota Sioux Tribe. Growing up, I went to a very small country school on the reservation, in the poorest county in the United States. Our school had predominantly Native students, but we were still taught what everybody was about Thanksgiving: It represented a time when “pilgrims and Indians” celebrated together, and it was about being thankful. Only later would we find out that it was a lie. ... My perspective on Thanksgiving has changed—at first from a sense of bitterness surrounding the real history of those lies we tell, of the actual stories we should honor and mourn, and then with a renewed hope for what our celebrations could be, if we simply changed our focus.

The thing is, we do not need the poisonous “pilgrims and Indians” narrative. We do not need that illusion of past unity to actually unite people today. Instead, we can focus simply on values that apply to everybody: togetherness, generosity and gratitude.

Response

Make us conscious of the bonds with which the [Creator] has linked us to all beings. (LS 220)

Reading

From “[Thanksgiving, Hope and the Hidden Heart of Evil](#),” by Jacqueline Keeler

When the Pilgrims came to Plymouth Rock, they were poor and hungry -- half of them died within a few months from disease and hunger. When Squanto, a Wampanoag man, found them, they were in a pitiful state. He spoke

English, having traveled to Europe, and took pity on them. Their English crops had failed. The native people fed them through the winter and taught them how to grow their food.

These were not merely "friendly Indians." They had already experienced European slave traders raiding their villages for a hundred years or so, and they were wary -- but it was their way to give freely to those who had nothing. Among many of our peoples, showing that you can give without holding back is the way to earn respect. Among the Dakota, my father's people, they say, when asked to give, "Are we not Dakota and alive?" It was believed that by giving there would be enough for all -- the exact opposite of the system we live in now, which is based on selling, not giving.

In stories told by the Dakota people, an evil person always keeps his or her heart in a secret place separate from the body. The hero must find that secret place and destroy the heart in order to stop the evil.

I see, in the "First Thanksgiving" story, a hidden Pilgrim heart. The story of that heart is the real tale than needs to be told. What did it hold? Bigotry, hatred, greed, self-righteousness? We have seen the evil that it caused in the 350 years since. Genocide, environmental devastation, poverty, world wars, racism.

Where is the hero who will destroy that heart of evil? I believe it must be each of us. Indeed, when I give thanks this Thursday and I cook my native food, I will be thinking of this hidden heart and how my ancestors survived the evil it caused.

Because if we can survive, with our ability to share and to give intact, then the evil and the good will that met that Thanksgiving day in the land of the Wampanoag will have come full circle.

And the healing can begin.

Reflection and Sharing

Please pause and reflect on these readings, and when you are ready, feel free to share.

- What words, phrases, or ideas are drawing your attention?
- What can we learn about gratitude from these readings?
- How can reflecting on our "sins and errors" lead us to gratitude and healing?

Prayer

Mi'kmaq Prayer for Thanksgiving (found at [Many Hoops Around Thanksgiving](#))

Creator, open our hearts
to peace and healing between all people.
Creator, open our hearts
to provide and protect for all children of the earth.
Creator, open our hearts
to respect for the earth, and all the gifts of the earth.
Creator, open our hearts
to end exclusion, violence, and fear among all.
Thank you for the gifts of this day and every day.

