

VILLAGE VIEW

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Saying something about Thanksgiving that's not been said before presents a real challenge. We all know the story of the First Thanksgiving at Plymouth when the Pilgrims, after having endured their first winter in the New World, planting their first summer's gardens and gathering their first harvest, set aside a day of celebration and gratitude.

That approximately half their number had died since setting foot on the Plymouth strands made giving thanks for those remaining even more heartfelt. Having withstood the rigors of the first winter, each knew what to expect in coming months and how fortunate he or she was to be among those still able to rejoice. The good harvest allayed fears of what the on-rushing winter months might bring, and in each of the Pilgrims sprang hope that a second summer would find all alive and well.

In connection with our American Thanksgiving it's seldom recognized that giving thanks with a post-harvest feast day is practiced almost universally by all societies; it's not unique to the Plymouth pilgrims. From time immemorial humanity has offered prayers of thanksgiving for the bounty of the earth, and while it makes the gratitude of our forebears no less

admirable, it does give the holiday greater scope to know they didn't originate the idea.

Enumerating things for which we are, can be and ought to be thankful can only be imprecise, for each living being is appreciative of different things depending upon circumstances. Those who give thanks for the love of their families exclude individuals who are without relatives. Those who give thanks for good health stand apart from those who are sick. The wealthy may be thankful for their possessions, but that leaves the poor who are hardly grateful for poverty.

Thankfulness, then, is a deeply personal feeling and must be experienced and expressed by everyone in terms of private perception of blessings received. No two people, not even twins, have exactly identical experiences and responses in common, other than life itself.

Life, then, is a primary reason for everyone to be thankful. Closely related to being alive is sustaining its continuance, and since all living things must be fed, giving thanks for food is natural, especially if food has been a scarce commodity.

What of those among us who seem ungrateful? To whom warmth of morning sunshine comes as a blinding glare, splendor of sunsets herald nothing but the coming night's darkness, safety and security of home appears more burden than joy, blessings of worthwhile work are viewed with distaste? To some, even love of nearest and dearest fails to satisfy, and gifts, large and small, are ignored.

Why does such a sad state afflict some of us? How does it happen that large numbers of people fail to respond with simple thanks? Open doors for some people and reap smiling rewards; from others, nary a nod.

Offer a smile and it's met with a blank stare or even a frown. Offer a job worth doing and it's turned down with a sneer. Offer a helping hand and it's rejected. Offer to share and, if it's accepted, there's no word of thanks. Gifts go

unacknowledged, hospitality is taken for granted, a sincere compliment is mistaken for flattery, a favor granted goes unreturned, even in times of need.

Where are the simple words of thanks and why are they not forthcoming? Do we have too much? Are we surfeited with everything? Have we come to expect every whim to be satisfied with little or no effort on our own part? Is saying thanks too costly? Do many of us neglect showing appreciation because we're so concerned with ourselves we truly lack gratitude for efforts others make in our behalf?

Should you think the charge unjustified, think back and recall your own experiences in the past month. Did the children who rang your doorbell on Halloween thank you when they took their treats? Did the boy who raked your leaves thank you when you paid him? How about the person at the checkout counter of the supermarket?

A family who fed and housed an exchange student last summer received no "bread-and-butter" letter after he returned to Europe. An older couple who sent an expensive wedding gift to the daughter of their close friend did receive a note from the bride; it came ten weeks after the ceremony.

A wife whose husband never fails to provide a generous allowance for household expenses accepts it without comment. A husband whose wife plans every meal around his preferences gives no word of appreciation, only complains if dinner is less than a gourmet production.

At birthday parties children neglect to thank their guests for gifts; and the guests forget to thank the birthday child's mother for inviting them to attend.

What has happened to thanksgiving? Is it no more than a holiday we celebrate but once a year, and that, by stuffing ourselves with food to the point of discomfort? And then, give no thanks? In how many homes, as the family gathers around the over-burdened Thanksgiving table, will hands be joined and heads bowed in thanks? In how many will anyone thank the breadwinner or the cook? What's become of the old fashioned virtue of saying "Thank You"?

There could be no better time than now to re-emphasize the true meaning, not only of this holiday, but of the blessings of all our days. It's never too soon to remind ourselves and each other...the old, the middle-aged, and the young...to be appreciative and to speak of our gratefulness to one another at every opportunity.

What a difference it makes at the end of a hard day's work to hear praise from the person for whom you toil! With such a word, frustrations melt away and anger fizzle to nothing. In their stead a warm glow spreads, easing away fatigue. Where simmered doubts that anyone notices extra efforts or special pains, certainty that they were worth the trouble sparks to life.

It takes the smallest word to erase tiredness and create contentment. It takes only simple thanks.

It costs but a second in time; the afterglow lasts for hours. It costs nothing in effort; the energy it generates is enormous.

Children don't naturally say "thank you" and neither do adults. It's a grace learned, drilled, repeated until habit forms. Once a habit, however, it's easy, natural, right. "Please" is often remembered because when we use it we want something.

"Thanks" is a loving word given when we've already gotten what we want. Perhaps that's why it's more often overlooked even though the more important.

Enjoy Thanksgiving. Enjoy giving thanks.