

VILLAGE VIEW

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A time of year that needs all the help it can get...that's November. In spite of those lovely Indian Summer Days, November tends to be dreary, starting off on the wrong foot with the end of Day Light Saving Time. With the return to Standard Time, evening seems to arrive before the afternoon is half over; the extra hour of sunlight in the morning is soon swallowed up in the lingering darkness of longer nights.

Even the landscape looks depressing. Now the bright autumnal foliage is dull and drab. Most deciduous trees have dropped their leaves; rains pelt them into a soggy mass fine for mulching gardens but suffocating to lawns, and cheerless in any case.

Holidays of November contribute much-needed spiritual lift, starting with Election Day in the month's first week. Even those too lazy to vote can't escape feeling curious about who the winners will be. Voters, of course, are rewarded with virtuous feelings of having done their civic duty.

Veteran's Day provides a certain bitter-sweet relief from routine. Parades, flags snapping in the wind, stirring marches rendered in the blare of trumpets and the rattle of drums seldom fail to quicken our emotions.

Finally comes Thanksgiving Day, punctuating the close of our eleventh month with all the traditional touches, part and parcel of family gatherings, turkey dinners, and the warmth of love and friendship that only sharing in the celebration brings. As holidays go, Thanksgiving rates second only to Christmas in drawing the generations together. This is a time for sharing not only among members of the immediate family, but also with those more distant, with friends and relatives who might otherwise be alone and lonely.

As the family circle enlarges to include aunts, uncles, cousins, even friends and neighbors, children have opportunities to form relationships that span a life-time of years. Seeing at the dinner table the faces of older people gives youngsters a feeling of their own place in the family, reinforces their sense of continuity and belonging. As the holiday spirit steals through the gathering with the arrival of guests, the joys of giving are demonstrated and experienced.

Sometimes the group celebrating Thanksgiving is a small one; perhaps the table is set for only four or five. Even

so, the spirit of sharing abides. Other times the gathering may number in the twenties or more. Some families are so large, they hire a hall to accommodate all who want to participate. However many congregate, however, it's the holiday spirit that makes it a special occasion, not its size nor composition.

So strong is this spirit, this indefinable feeling of good fortune, generosity, gratitude, and of being blessed, it's remarkable we limit ourselves to celebrating Thanksgiving only once each year. While it's probably true that formal observance of Thanksgiving on a daily basis would detract from and diffuse the spirit and make it commonplace, our blessings are, after all, a daily occurrence. Is this annual observance adequate to show our appreciation of all the joys of our lives?

What is the element of the Thanksgiving holiday that makes it different from other gatherings? Not specifically the food we serve and enjoy, and not enumeration of our advantages and favorable circumstances. In the excitement and flurry of arriving guests, in the busyness of last-minute preparation in the kitchen, in the conviviality during the meal and while the cleaning-up process goes on, we tend to forget the real reasons for Thanksgiving Day.

What makes it different...and truly special...is the coming together to commemorate our on-going good fortunes. We may anticipate the gathering with pleasure, but not until our guests begin to arrive does the spirit begin to rise in our hearts. Or, if we are the guests, not until the welcoming greetings surround us, do we feel the celebration has begun. It is at that moment the excitement swells and the real joy of the holiday experienced.

Imagine for a fleeting second what our lives might be like without other people. Imagine having no family, no friend, no acquaintance. Imagine walking the earth throughout your life, a stranger to all. No one to smile at and receive a smile in return. No one to share a joke, a pleasure, a sorrow. No one to talk with, to listen, to confide in, to trust. Without other people, where would our pleasures be?

Consider the hermit. Does he communicate? Not even the hermit shuts the world entirely away. There may be a dog or a cat. There may be a hen, a pig, a mouse, a spider, or a toad. No human being so lacks the need to be in touch with other living creatures that he never communicates with the world around him...not even the hermit.

What would November be like were Thanksgiving Day abolished? Would it be a better period in the year?

Or would you feel an emptiness, a deficiency...deprived, somehow, of the spiritual lift the holiday imparts? And what element of the day is essential to the celebration? What traditions could be eliminated without destroying the spirit?

Only the people and their coming together to share. In the interplay of relationships among the people around us, we find the essence of Thanksgiving.