

## **Saint Aidan's Thanksgiving handout 2022**

Readings assigned by the Church for this day – and a homily including a story about feasting.

Almighty and gracious Father, we give you thanks for the fruits of the earth in their season and for the labors of those who harvest them. Make us, we pray, faithful stewards of your great bounty, for the provision of our necessities and the relief of all who are in need, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

### **Deuteronomy 26:1-11**

When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

### **Psalm 100 *Jubilate Deo***

Be joyful in the LORD, all you lands; \*  
serve the LORD with gladness  
and come before his presence with a song.  
Know this: The LORD himself is God; \*  
he himself has made us, and we are his;  
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.  
Enter his gates with thanksgiving;  
go into his courts with praise; \*  
give thanks to him and call upon his Name.  
For the LORD is good;  
his mercy is everlasting; \*  
and his faithfulness endures from age to age.

### **Philippians 4:4-9**

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

### **John 6:25-35**

When the crowd found Jesus on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

### **Thanksgiving Homily, including a story**

Happy Thanksgiving. All thanksgiving festivals, and harvest festivals, include an awareness of the tenuousness of our lives and our need to help the most vulnerable, incorporate care for the poor and hungry. So we take time to give thanks for the miracle of our life and all that makes it possible, as well as to reach out in concern for those less well provided for.

On Thanksgiving it is good to pause for reflection in the midst of our day of festival gathering, following an ancient pattern which gives meaning to life by stopping to give thanks.

The first lesson, from Deuteronomy, is one of my favorite passages in the Pentateuch. It gives a good outline of a proper Thanksgiving celebration: first, remember your past and the past of your people; then as an expression of gratitude for all that is good in them, offer to God the first fruits, recognizing that all that we have is a gift from God, then finally, everyone celebrate! Rejoice in the bounty which God has provided.

The reading from Philippians admonishes us to 'Rejoice always.' Life is to be lived within a context of Thanksgiving and Rejoicing, because of the bounty of the Lord. This awareness of the goodness of God and the blessings of our lives enables us to follow the Epistle's advice to focus on the good things, on everything pleasing, pure, commendable, true, honorable, excellent, or praiseworthy. We are assured that if we live this kind of life, a life of rejoicing and gratitude, memory and awareness, the blessing of God will be with us.

The Gospel lesson talks about the different kinds of nourishment that are available to us.

- There is the seemingly ordinary bread of daily life, which itself is the result of the miracle of grain growing from seed and of the work of many people: planting, tending, harvesting, grinding, baking, and transporting it to us.
- There is the manna in the wilderness, called the ‘bread of heaven’ or ‘the bread of angels’, a miraculous nourishment that appeared unexpectedly and provided nourishment for the wandering people without any human work beyond picking it up. This bread is and was seen as a sign of God’s love, an acknowledgement of the fear and the need of the people in the wilderness.
- But Jesus says that even this miraculously provided bread, which may have sustained the faith of some, is not truly the Bread of Heaven, the gift of God which will nourish people’s hearts and souls always. Jesus says that He is that bread, the nourishment that God provides for our selves and our souls forever.

Thanksgiving is an opportunity to practice this kind of living, living in memory and awareness, which encourage us to gratitude and rejoicing. We remember and acknowledge all that is wonderful in our lives and we share our thankfulness as we share our food.

Probably my favorite Thanksgiving story is the story of the Mowzel cat. It has nothing to do with Pilgrims or Indians or Turkeys or corn. In fact it is not an American story at all. It takes place in MouseHole, (pronounced Mowzel) a tiny fishing village in Cornwall, historically totally dependent on the sea to feed its people. The story is written within an imagined feline cosmology.

One year terrible storms keep all the fishing boats trapped in the snug harbor. The boats are safe but the people (and cats) begin to run out of food. So Old Tom, a fisherman whose wife has long ago died and whose family is all grown, decides he should be the one to make a run for it, to try to get his boat through the mousehole mouth of the harbor out to the open sea, so he can get food for the town. His loyal cat Mowzer determines to come with him, because in her view the storm is caused by the Great Storm Cat which no human could withstand.

So man and cat head out toward the breakwater, Mowzer raises her voice to join in the howling of the great Storm Cat, and they are able to just get through during a lull in the wind. When they are out in the open water, Mowzer must sing again so that the Storm Cat will be still enough for the nets to be put out. They make a tremendous catch of all manner of fish. In her pleasure at the hold full of fish Mowzer begins to purr loudly. Since cats do not normally purr out in the wind and rain, it is startling to the Great Storm Cat – and soothing. So the storm begins to die down and Old Tom steers the boat for home.

It is dark when they reach the harbor, but they have no trouble finding their way, because the breakwater and the entire waterfront are shining with lanterns, put out to guide them home when the townspeople discovered that Tom had taken his boat into the storm to save them.

That night there was a great feasting, by people and cats, on all kinds of fish. There was great gratitude and rejoicing for their deliverance from starvation, for the end of the storm, for the courage of Old Tom (and Mowzer). It is said that ever after there has been a feast each year in December, honoring Old Tom and remembering his courage and the deliverance of the town. They say that the cats also celebrate and raise a great caterwauling in memory of Mowzer. This storybook celebration is a fine example of the thanksgiving festival commended by our lessons. Here are the rules:

- Remember the past with gratitude.
- Offer thanks for the gifts of your life.
- See to the needs of the poor
- and rejoice, celebrate.

That is the way it’s done. Happy Thanksgiving to everyone!