

Thanks Be to God

FRED A. SCHWENDIMAN

Remarks by Jeffrey R. Holland

I am always grateful for the Thanksgiving Holiday. It seems singularly without commercial exploitation, as Christmas can so seriously suffer, and is generally not hidden in its true purpose, the way bunny rabbits can obscure the meaning of Easter.

Thanksgiving is just that—Thanksgiving. It is crisp like an autumn apple and brisk like November air. It is family. It is friends. And it is a commandment: “Thou shalt thank the Lord they God in all things” (D&C 59:7), the revelations tell us. “Give thanks unto God . . . for whatsoever blessing ye are blessed with” (D&C 46:32).

But, even as we count our blessings, blessings which are so abundantly given and must never be taken for granted, we have reason to remember today that there is work yet to be done before everyone—even everyone in Provo—can rejoice with us. In a week when we have the victorious fruits of a successful football season, a much appreciated holiday from school, the approach of a semester’s ending, and for many even the anticipation of missions and marriage, we pause to mourn the stupefyingly senseless murder of a wonderful young man. Just a student here, your neighbor and friend (even if you didn’t know him), the husband of Dixie and the father of Shaun and

Kyle. In just three more weeks Dan Okelberry would have held his third son—or his first daughter—in his arms. Now, during this season of thankfulness and joy for the rest of us, Dixie and Shaun and Kyle and a new little one will ache for those arms to be around them and will try to understand why. Surely God alone can give that answer, and surely he alone knows the full measure of their pain. Fortunately, he alone can fully comfort them.

As I mentioned in a statement in the *Daily Universe* this morning, I am grateful for what is being done to help this young family. Many of you will want to help. But that is not my purpose here. I pray here that somewhere, sometime during this wonderful week, while remembering what rich and limitless blessings we enjoy, we will also remember the task yet to be completed in a world still far too full of brutality and injustice and pain. In such a world where many are without them, what will be our expression of thankfulness for blessings we’ve been given—for love and family and friends, for the days and years we have to enjoy them? Will we try to be more

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kind? Will we try to be more helpful? Will we find someone to comfort? Will we do our best to share?

The pain of this young man's death—it might as well have been you or I—reminds us, in case we had forgotten, that there are givers and there are takers in this world. And so this Thursday, one day after your classmate is buried, you have a chance to help balance the great scales by which this world is being weighed and too often found wanting. You can reach into your lives of unprecedented abundance, and, as your personal statement against such wrenching selfishness, you can give something to someone. Give love and laughter. Give patience and peace. Show appreciation. Be courteous. Answer another's prayer. Bring a blessing to someone who needs it.

In this Thanksgiving season I am grateful for each one of you. Part of *my* thanks this Thursday will be for you. Because of what you mean to me, I am troubled beyond expression when one of you seems wrongfully hurt or unhappy. Have an abundant Thanksgiving holiday. And in the course of it, find some private place to kneel and vow to do your increased share as a giver. I don't know how else we can ever win the war against the takers.

Fred A. Schwendiman

My dear brothers and sisters. I am very grateful for the privilege accorded me to address you on the eve of the important Thanksgiving recognition we give to this Thursday's holiday. I am confident that I am the most blessed of you all, as I have been privileged to be a member of the administrative staff of BYU for the past thirty years. It has brought important and special responsibilities to me and my family. In carrying them through, we have been blessed in many ways. To be closely associated with President Ernest L. Wilkinson, President Dallin Oaks, and now President Jeffrey R. Holland has enriched our lives. I have watched

these great men work to build this university to a pinnacle of size, quality, and strength that makes possible your presence on this campus this very day. I salute them and express a deep gratitude for their excellent achievements.

Gratitude a Way of Life

I wish to share with you an awareness that thanksgiving should be in our hearts and expressed in our actions every day of the year, not just on 25 November 1982.

Stanley Dixon penned these most thoughtful words that were set to beautiful music like that we are hearing this hour:

*Thanks be to God for roses rare,
For skies of blue and sunshine fair.
For every gift I raise a prayer,
Thanks be to God.*

*Thanks be to God for lovely night,
For mystic fields with stars bedight,
For hours of dream and deep delight,
Thanks be to God.*

*Thanks be to God for love divine,
The hopes that 'round my heart entwine,
For all the joy that now is mine,
Thanks be to God.*

[Stanley Dixon (New York: Associated Music Publishers)]

President N. Eldon Tanner has said, "Thanksgiving Day gives each and every one of us an invitation and a wonderful opportunity to pause and count our many blessings and to give thanks to God and praise him from whom all blessings flow" ("Thanksgiving 1968," *Church News*, 23 November 1968, p. 9).

President Marion G. Romney, in his address in the past general conference, made us deeply aware of the principle of gratitude and thanksgiving, and I quote:

The virtues of gratitude have been widely extolled and the sinfulness of ingratitude has been just as widely condemned.

He continued:

It has been said that “an ungrateful man is like a hog under a tree eating acorns, but never looking up to see where they come from” (Timothy Dexter, The New Dictionary of Thoughts [Garden City, NY: Standard Book, 1961], p. 308).

*Jesus revealed his feeling about ingratitude when only one of ten lepers whom he had healed turned back and gave thanks. [“Gratitude and Thanksgiving,” *Ensign*, November 1982, p. 49]*

We can read this account in Luke 17:11–18.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has said: “True worship includes *thanksgiving* to God—the acknowledging and confessing with joy and gladness of the benefits and mercies which he bestows upon his children” (MD, p. 788).

I submit that the thanksgiving we should acknowledge should be an everyday occurrence directed to him who created us all.

It seems appropriate to share with you the statement the First Presidency gave to the Church this past Saturday in the *Church News*:

As the season of Thanksgiving approaches, it brings with it the reminder that this cherished holiday had its birth in religious faith and still finds its best expression in prayers of gratitude and repentance. For this Thanksgiving and the joyful Christmas season to follow, our counsel to all men and women everywhere is, remember the scripture injunction, “Thou shalt thank the Lord thy God in all things.” (D&C 59:7.)

Ingratitude is one of the woeful failings of our society. The failure to acknowledge the sovereignty and the beneficence of God, the refusal to bend our will to His, are at the very root of the major problems in our society.

Prayer, family prayer in the homes of people in all lands, is one of the simple medicines that would

check the dread disease that robs men and women of honesty, character and integrity. In generations past, individual and family prayers, in the homes of people throughout the world were as much a part of the day’s activity as was eating. As the practice of prayer has diminished, moral decay has increased.

The inclination to be holy, to be thankful, is increased as family members kneel together and thank the Lord for life and peace and all that they may become under His guidance. In remembering together before the Lord the poor, the needy, the oppressed, there is developed, unconsciously but realistically, a love for others above self, a respect for others, a desire to serve the needs of others. One cannot ask God to help a neighbor in distress without being motivated to do something toward helping that neighbor.

*What miracles would be evident if, beginning now, beginning this Thanksgiving season, we all would lay aside our own selfishness and lose ourselves in the service of others. Our prayers of Thanksgiving, this season and daily all through the year, will bring comfort to our hearts, knit us together in love, and open to us the treasures of wisdom, knowledge, gratitude and forgiveness. [“Express thanks in prayers and service, say Church leaders,” *Church News*, 20 November 1982, p. 3]*

Expression of Gratitude Important

In positive reflection I turn to doctrinal references which place special responsibilities on us all to express our gratitude to our Creator. “Thou shalt thank the Lord thy God in all things.” This important commandment, found in section 59, verse 7, of the Doctrine and Covenants, is as binding upon us as any other law of God. We are commanded to do “all things with prayer and thanksgiving,” and “Ye must give thanks unto God in the Spirit for whatsoever blessing ye are blessed with” (D&C 46:7, 32).

Now, Thanksgiving Day 1982 is soon upon us. What will we do with it? This year will it

merely be a day of feasting, watching TV, or seeking pleasure?

When the day was first instituted, it was regarded as a religious observance completely in line with the commandments I just stated. The Pilgrims, it will be remembered, were grateful for their very lives; and whom did they thank? Almighty God. They knew the source of their blessings. They knew they had been preserved by a divine hand. Most of you in this assembly have been blessed with pioneer ancestors who would testify that they were preserved to arrive in these valleys because of divine intervention in their behalf.

So now, what about ourselves? Are we willing to recognize that our daily blessings are provided by other efforts than our own? The arrogance of much of mankind today merely states, "I've done it myself."

I submit that our blessings flow from many, many others and through divine approbation. As an example, one of the most important things on earth, essential to our welfare, is plain, ordinary water. Did we make it? Did we pipe it into our homes? Did we make the pipe? Did we sterilize it so that it would be bacteria free? And, who provided the streams from which water comes? Who caused the rains to fall, the earth to be fertile? Who first gave us seeds to plant? Who placed cows and sheep and birds and trees on the earth?

Are we not dependent upon him and his creations? No one can measure the gratitude we owe to the Almighty as the Great Provider. No one can measure the appreciation we owe to our fellowmen, those who plant and harvest, and those who provide services on every hand. In this complex world there is a network of interdependency among us all. So many others are involved in providing for us the things which we ourselves could not provide, it is folly to ignore them. We ride in cars and planes, but did we make them? We use oil and gasoline, but from where did they come?

We eat bread and drink milk for our health, but did we produce them?

When Paul wrote to Timothy about the latter days, he gave as one of the signs of the times the fact that people would become "unthankful, unholy" (2 Timothy 3:2). This is an interesting combination of words—that one with ungrateful attitudes can be unholy, their roots being in the same evil source. Ingratitude, of course, is unholy from every standpoint. It is evil in itself. Let's turn to appreciation, gratitude, and thanks.

So, on this special Thanksgiving 1982, what will be your list of "gratitudes"?

Three Reasons for Gratitude

I desire to share just *three* of my own. Hundreds of blessings are found in each of these three for which I daily thank my Father in Heaven:

1. *My citizenship* in this great United States of America.
2. *My membership* in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
3. *My wife* and family.

Now, just a brief reference to each:

1. *I love my country*. It has been good to me. I have been pleased to serve in the U.S. Navy Reserve for thirty-four years. While I was a guest in the home of Admiral Emmet L. Tidd, in Washington, D.C., not too long ago, he shared this experience. He had just returned to Washington, D.C., following an extended trip to several major powers in the world to assess their strengths for the Chief of Naval Operations. He observed on his return that our country, with all its political, social, and economic problems, is still so *far ahead* of whichever country might be second, he would have no second thoughts about his love for America and his faith in this great country and where he would want to reside. I feel the same way. Some outsider has said, "Your country may not be a rose garden, but it also is not a patch of weeds." I am blessed every day

because of being a citizen in this land. Having just returned from the Mideast on university business, I can't figure out why I was so blessed as to be assigned to be raised up and to live in this special land rather than where I have just visited, or in some other part of the world.

I am grateful for a student body expression twice each day that permits students to stand in reverence and thought each morning as the *Star Spangled Banner* is played, and the flag is raised, and then again lowered the same way in the late afternoon. Visitors to our campus stand in awe as this is done. Some say it is old-fashioned. If so, I will take the old-fashioned way.

Where do you stand on the appreciation of this land of liberty? President David O. McKay once stated: "We are grateful for this land of America, 'choice above all other lands.' The freedom vouchsafed by the Constitution of the United States, which guarantees to every man the right to worship . . . in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience, made possible the establishment of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" ("Thanksgiving 1968," *Church News*, 23 November 1968, p. 9). I am thankful for this event.

2. *I value and treasure my membership in the Church:* I was privileged to be born in New Zealand while my parents were serving together on their first mission. How blessed I've been to have parents so wonderful that they have given me a royal heritage of membership in the Church. They themselves have been living examples for us to follow. They are here today. I wish them to know how much I love and appreciate them. How fortunate for me to fill a mission and thereby fortify my testimony of the Church and all it means in our lives. I will be eternally grateful for the training and leadership opportunities I have experienced through my Church assignments. What a blessing to you and to me to recognize

our church's commitment to education. We are the recipients of the privilege of this great campus. Let's not fall short of measuring up to expectations of our respected Church and university leaders.

Yes, we are blessed through our membership in the Church. If we are faithful, these blessings have eternal application. Let's not forget that. Is your Church membership worthy of a special thanksgiving expression?

3. *I love my wife, Nonie, and my family very much.* I've been blessed with a beautiful eternal companion, together completing forty-two years last week. Busy with Church and school life these forty-two years, she jokes about having to marry me to get rid of me; but we have a relationship I would wish for all of you young marriage prospects. It isn't easy living with a fellow like me, but we are planning on many, many more years together. Nonie is as beautiful inside as you see her on the outside. So, with three wonderful children, eleven grandchildren, and a few adopted ones, life is very sweet and worthwhile.

How does one best express thanks for all of this? I must thank a very compassionate Father in Heaven. Do you have a special reason this holiday season to feel as I do about my family?

Conclusion

Now, I recognize that my Thanksgiving expressions for country, church, and family blessings must be directed to my Father in Heaven. You have heard three of my gratuities. What will be the gratuities you may express to your Father in Heaven this Thanksgiving season?

Some years ago I read a simple Thanksgiving prayer:

O, heavenly Father:

*We thank Thee for food and remember the hungry.
We thank Thee for health and remember the sick.*

*We thank Thee for friends and remember the
friendless.*

*We thank Thee for freedom and remember the
enslaved.*

*May these remembrances stir us to service
That Thy gifts may be used for others. [Abigail
Van Buren, "Dear Abby," *Deseret News*, 25
November 1976, p. 4C]*

Said in another way by Wilfred A. Peterson:

*The art of thanksgiving is thanks living. It is grati-
tude in action. It is applying Albert Schweitzer's*

*philosophy: "In gratitude for your own good fortune
you must render in return some sacrifice of your
life or other life."*

*It is thanking God for each new day by living
it to the fullest. ["The Art of Thanksgiving,"
The Art of Living (New York: Simon and
Schuster, 1961), pp. 44–45]*

My prayer for each of us is that during
this Thanksgiving season we can all count our
blessings in a way that truthfully says, "Thanks
be to God," in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.