

Have a Thankful Thanksgiving

By Al Riskowski

The only thoughts many Americans have about Thanksgiving are a long weekend and a wonderful opportunity to eat a great meal. To some it is the start of the Christmas season. All of the above is true about Thanksgiving. However, what is the real meaning behind this holiday?

In the middle of the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln, proclaimed a national Thanksgiving Day, to be celebrated on the final Thursday in November:

I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.”

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Catherine Millard writes: We can trace this historic American Christian tradition to the year 1623. After the harvest crops were gathered in November, Governor William proclaimed:

“All ye Pilgrims with your wives and little ones, do gather at the Meeting House, on the hill... there to listen to the pastor, and render Thanksgiving to the Almighty God for all His blessings.”

During the early 1700's individual colonies commonly observed days of thanksgiving throughout each year. **It was a day set aside for prayer and fasting.**

Thanksgiving Day Proclamation made by George Washington in 1789.

“Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and Whereas both Houses of Congress have, requested me "to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by

acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness:"

Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been able to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted' for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us.

Whatever traditions your family may have surrounding Thanksgiving I encourage you to take some time that day to give thanks to the Lord for His many and varied blessings, just as our forefathers did.