

Reflections on Gratitude
by
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Interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration
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These are extraordinary times and aren't we all aware of it? The economy is in the tank, joblessness on the rise, personal debt skyrocketing, 40 million have no healthcare, the mortgage crisis limps on, and two wars sap and scar the brave men and women of our military. For most of a decade, we first slipped and then fell head-over-heels into a deep hole. Many people have been devastated; some are out of work and hungry; all are scared. We cannot even say if the worst is over...or yet to come.

I might continue painting with the black brush of frustration and despair, except that there is so much for which to be grateful...
especially now.

With the eve of Thanksgiving upon us, with a brightening spirit in the hearts of the American people (and the citizens of the world), with the return of hope to our souls, we give thanks and praise for these times of great change.

The opportunities we have right now—opportunities to grow in our stewardship of this fragile earth, our island home; to provide healthcare for *ALL* and not just the rich; to educate the depressed and distressed as well as the privileged; to re-imagine the American dream of owning a home; to invent and generate millions of *green* jobs; etc., etc., etc.—these opportunities and others are truly a gift.

Ironically, without being at the bottom of that deep, eight year-long abyss, we might never have seized on these opportunities; we might not have been inspired to embrace real change, change we can believe in; we might not have recognized that new leadership and a new vision was desperately needed...and possible.

Lest these remarks sound overtly partisan, I hasten to add that in the past three weeks we have seen a welcome moderation in the kind of rhetoric that has characterized our national debate about important issues for too long. Constructive conversation and genuine reconciliation are beginning to bridge the divide. Can you believe that the Republican and Democratic candidates for President actually sat down *to work together* on the future of our nation last week? It is unprecedented and ever-so healing.

President-elect Obama said late on the night of November 4th, *“If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.”*

We have much for which to be thankful right now. As we anticipate the change we deserve, we must also work toward achieving those changes. The gifts of God for the people of God require our involvement and commitment, our molding, shaping, and transforming energy.

To quote words from another time of national challenge: *“The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise—with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew”* (Abraham Lincoln to Congress, December 1862).

And George Washington, in a letter to Benjamin Harrison, said 78 years earlier, *“A people...who are possessed of the spirit of commerce, who see and who will pursue their advantages may achieve almost anything.”*

Then there is this from FDR 75 years ago: *“If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships—the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together, in the same world at peace.”*

So too, Martin Luther King, Jr. observed, *“All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence.”*

At this propitious moment, we know the road is long and the climb steep, to paraphrase our new President. And so, let us give thanks for having been asked to help remake our nation? “*Yes, we can*” was the refrain on November 4th and it needs be our refrain in these coming weeks and months and years.

Tonight, representing all of the people of Bloomfield, we give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty of earth and sky and sea; for the richness of mountains, plains, and rivers; for the songs of birds and the loveliness of flowers.

Grant that we may continue to grow in our grateful enjoyment of your abundant creation. And, we pray that we may safeguard these good gifts for our posterity.

We thank you for the wonder of life and for the mystery of love. We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side.

We thank you for setting us at tasks which demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us.

We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone.

Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that at all times and in all places we may give thanks to you in all things.

Amen.