Reflections from Fr. Dennis Gallagher, Provincial of the Assumptionists North American Province



Should we sing patriotic hymns at Mass? At the parish I go to on weekends, “America the Beautiful” or even “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” is often the recessional hymn on weekends before national holidays. At one time there seemed to be more ambivalence about this - mixing up, it was said, two different loyalties and two different loves. That's not unreasonable, but one hears this complaint less frequently nowadays. Maybe it's the circle I travel in.

The civic holiday that appears least in danger of being out of sync with Christian sensibilities is Thanksgiving. You could certainly muck up that assertion by referencing the treatment of Native Americans, but at least in terms of the core disposition underlying the holiday, its affinity with Christian faith is pretty clear. To have survived the perils of the voyage and the hardships of

settling in an unfamiliar and often inhospitable land was just the ticket for setting aside time to give thanks. It must have felt like redemption. Protection from disease, the blessing of a bountiful harvest, freedom from religious persecution were all signs of a divine hand at work.

Give thanks in all circumstances, St. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians.· A ritual act of thanksgiving is the source and the summit of the Christian life. The early Christian community knew themselves to be a Eucharistic community, which meant not only that they gathered regularly to celebrate that ritual act of thanksgiving, but they understood their whole lives as an offering of thanksgiving to God. For all that differentiates one from another, G.K. Chesterton notes that the holiness of all the saints draws from a deep wellspring of giving thanks.

A feeling of indebtedness is not a large part of our cultural DNA as Americans. The flattening out of a transcendent horizon contributes to a growing insensibility to a fundamental truth: it is not our making and doing that constitutes the full meaning of our lives, but rather all that we have been given, all that we have received as gift.

We Americans love our Thanksgiving. We need it more than ever.