

*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*

A couple of weeks ago, I was reflecting on a Thanksgiving past. In 1973, I was living in New York City and in my second year at General Theological Seminary. I did not have the money to fly to Georgia and back and knew that there were many seminarians who, like me, could not afford to go home. So, to quote a local Statesboroian, I decided to have a “street sweeper”, a gathering in which all persons who needed a place to go were included in the invitation list. And so, that is what wHappened.

As we in our Moveable Feasts, people were asked to bring a side dish and wine. Here is a partial list of the party goers: Dan Fee was a seminarian at ETS that I had met when I was doing Clinical Pastoral Education at St. Luke Hospital and his partner from Puerto Rico; my Catholic Priest friend, Fr. Vincent McNamara from Church of the Holy Name; the son of the African-American Bishop of Pittsburg; my New Testament professor, a Jesuit who taught had GTS when his seminary was forced to close its doors; and other students who needed a place to be and have a Thanksgiving meal.

People began arriving at 11:00 am and the last left around 11:00 pm. A roomful of strangers came together and laughed and talked and listened to music but mostly ate. Needless to say, a good time was had by all. I have no doubts at all that the Holy Spirit was very present in that apartment on that Thanksgiving day.

I would like to read a portion of the verses from the Gospel of Matthew. “Therefore, do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all things will be given to you as well.”

There are basic needs that each of us require to function and be a part of the community and to remain in good health. Abraham Maslow, in the mid-1940’s, presented a five tiered model of human needs with the most basic at the bottom of his pyramid of the hierarchy of needs. The bottom tier contained food, water, warmth, shelter and rest; the next tier, security and safety; the next tier intimate relationships and friends and so on.

Jesus is not saying that food or water or clothing is not important because they are essential to our life and being a part of the community that we live in. Jesus is suggesting that there are priorities and the first priority is God and the Kingdom of Heaven.

When we give thanks, not just tomorrow, but throughout the year, what are we thankful for? Who sits at our life’s table? Even if we may wear the most expensive clothes on the rack or own a top-of-the-line car or live in the most pricey house on the block but are outside the Kingdom of God, then we have missed the boat. If we cannot love our God with all our heart and with all our

soul and all our strength and with all our mind and love our neighbor as ourselves, then we are nothing. This is what Jesus is reminding us in Matthew.

N. T. Wright describes today's gospel reading this way. "So when Jesus tells us not to worry about what to eat, or drink or wear, he doesn't mean that these things don't matter. He doesn't mean that we should prefer (as some teachers have suggested) to eat and drink as little as possible, and to wear the most ragged and disreputable clothes, just to show that we despise such things. Far from it! Jesus liked a party as much as anyone, and when he died the soldiers so admired his tunic that they threw dice for it rather than tearing it up. But the point was again priorities. Put the world first, and you'll find it gets moth-eaten in your hands. Put God first, and you'll get the world thrown in."

Do not ask me what we ate on that Thanksgiving Day in 1973; I cannot remember. Do not ask me what people were wearing; I do not recall. Do not ask me about specific conversation; I have no clue. But if you ask me how a gathering comprised of people representing different backgrounds and places of origins connected with one another; I will have to say that for twelve hours it was a "church". The priority was about loving one another and giving thanks to the God that brought us together and made that day. It was a party that I know Jesus would have liked.

Jesus has a way of bringing us together. But sometimes we have to send the invitation. Here is a second story I would like to share with you. No credit was given for this tale.

"The day before Thanksgiving an elderly man in Phoenix called his son in New York and said to him, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing; 45 years of misery is enough. We're sick of each other, and so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her.

"Frantic, the son called his sister, who exploded on the phone. "No way are they getting divorced," she shouted, "I'll take care of This." She called Phoenix immediately, and said to her father. "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?"

"The man hung up his phone and turned to his wife. "Okay, honey. The kids are coming for Thanksgiving and paying for their own flights." [sermoncentral]

God has way of bringing us to the table. And we play a part in bringing people to the feast. When we repeat our Baptismal vows, we declare: "I will with God's help." In 1973, with God's help, we came together strangers meeting strangers and reveled in the moment. Whether it is by subterfuge or the more direct approach, God moves us to be one, to love one another, to remind us that this table and the table that we eat at tomorrow and each day is the table of Jesus Christ our Lord. As one let us never, ever forget, the harvest that we receive are the gifts of God for the people of God. There are no exceptions.

A prayer from Msgr. Michael Buckley.

Thank you, Father, for having created us and given us to each other in the human family. Thank you for being with us in all our joys and sorrows, for your comfort in our sadness, your companionship in our loneliness. Thank you for yesterday, today, tomorrow and for the whole

of our lives. Thank you for friends, for health and for grace. May we live this and every day conscious of all that has been given to us.

Amen