

PENTECOST: SHARING NEW LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

November 25, 2010
Day of Thanksgiving

Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Psalm 100
Philippians 4:4-9
John 6:25-35

A Time to Remember; A Time to Give Thanks

The month of November began with a celebration of All Saints, a festival that reminds us to give thanks for the lives of those who have gone on before us and to remember with gratitude the “saints” among us today. So, too, does the Old Testament lesson for the Day of Thanksgiving call us to remember as it directs our focus to God’s promises and divine providence.

Following the close of the formal law codes (Deuteronomy 12—25), chapter 26 begins with a worshipful tone. The Israelites are about to enter the land promised to them by God. At the first harvest, the “first fruits” are to be offered to God as an act of thankfulness for God’s keeping his promise to give each one a share of the land. In so doing, the people are to remember and pray: “My ancestor was homeless, an Aramean who went to live in Egypt” (Deuteronomy 26:5b, *CEV*).

This prayer of remembrance is set within the context of a litany of thanksgiving. It calls to mind God’s saving acts and Israel’s ancestry that encompassed the wandering of Abraham [Abram] (cf. Genesis 11:31—12:9) and Jacob. Jacob wandered from southern Canaan to Haran and back (Genesis 27—35) and later went to Egypt (Genesis 46:3-7) where his family grew in great numbers (Exodus 1:1-7). The Israelites are to remember that their ancestors were once strangers in a foreign land—migrants, nomads, refugees—and that God rescued them from bondage and is now bringing them to a rich new land (Deuteronomy 26:8, 9).

At the conclusion of the prayer and the offering of their gifts, the Israelites are instructed to “celebrate by eating a meal” and “to invite the Levites and the foreigners who live in [their] land” (verse 11, *CEV*). This instruction to remember and include everyone in the community continues to have relevance for us today.

On this Thanksgiving, we are mindful of those in our midst who are homeless, lonely, without loved ones, or struggling in these difficult economic times. Thanks to countless volunteers, there will be churches, shelters, and soup kitchens in many communities across our land where a meal will be served and the spirit of hospitality will be extended to those in need.

In sharing a meal with others, we can hear Jesus' words, "I am the bread that gives life! No one who comes to me will ever be hungry. No one who has faith in me will ever be thirsty" (John 6:35, *CEV*). Because of Jesus, we can say with the apostle Paul that we are "always glad because of the Lord!" (Philippians 4:4, *CEV*). In this same passage, Paul says that "the Lord will soon be here" (Philippians 4:5b, *CEV*), which directs our focus to the end of November and the beginning of a new church year with the first Sunday of Advent, when we will mark a time of hopeful waiting for that day when Christ will return.

In the passage from Philippians, Paul exhorts us not to "worry about anything, but pray about everything." Let us then "with thankful hearts offer up [our] prayers and requests to God" and "never stop thinking about what is truly worthwhile and worthy of praise" (Philippians 4:6, 8b, *CEV*). As we celebrate this Thanksgiving, we remember to be thankful for God's gift, his beloved Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, "his gift that is too wonderful for words!" (2 Corinthians 9:15, *CEV*).

Thanksgiving – a time to remember and a time to give thanks.

This Reflection for Thanksgiving Day was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, formerly director of the Education Unit of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship at American Bible Society, who presently serves as a consultant to ABS.

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Today remember to pray with thankful hearts for Jesus, God's beloved Son, who is the bread of life. We remember those in need to whom we are called to share our bread and the "bread of life" so that all people everywhere will "have life in all its fullness."

Activity Corner: "Thanksgiving Bread"

Supplies needed: Bible; construction paper; "slice of bread" pattern; pens or pencils; scissors.

Invite members of your household to trace and cut out a "slice of bread." On one side, copy John 6:35 and discuss what Jesus means when he says that he is the "bread of life." In what ways can members of your household share "bread" with those in need in your community? On the reverse side of the "slide of bread," invite everyone to write a prayer for what and for whom they are thankful and wish to remember. Encourage each one to share their prayer as part of the table grace at a Thanksgiving meal. Conclude by praying together Psalm 100 and singing together a harvest or thanksgiving hymn such as "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come."