

Probably more than ever before in all of history, people across the country and around the world are looking forward to ringing in a brand-new year. Out with 2020, already! 2021 has got to be better, right? Prayerfully that will be true. Time will tell.

Well, if New Year's is about looking forward to the future, with a fresh new start then Thanksgiving is about remembering the past. Granted this year, has been filled with many things that we would just as soon *forget* including, but not limited to, the Pandemic and the Riots, but there truly are so many things for which we should be grateful even during this year. Yes, it is good to remember to give thanks to God during 2020!

To help with this, I would like you to picture in your mind a traditional Thanksgiving Day Dinner Table: Turkey, stuffing, and stories get handed from person to person. While the platters and gravy boats empty, the stories get filled out with new details and maybe a few embellishments. Some of the stories are practically as old the pilgrims! Others might have happened just last week. You can relive the past year simply by looking down the dining room table. Where grandma or a cousin once sat, there's now an empty chair; or maybe where there was just one chair, now there are two or three and the dining room's bursting at the seams with new members. The gray hairs, the lined faces, the round cheeks—all tell the story in their own way. You can sum up the day like this: Thanksgiving is about remembering.

It's been said the person who has no memory, who doesn't know where he or she comes from, cannot really give thanks. He or she doesn't know what to be thankful for or whom to thank. So in our Old Testament reading, Moses sets out to remind us who we are and where we come from, to help us remember. It's a short sermon, but he repeats it many times: "Remember the Lord"; "Remember and do not forget." I wonder if the Israelites ever got tired of hearing that sermon time after time. Did they tune Moses out after a few minutes? "There he goes again. Uh, Moses, sir, we already heard that one." This evening, the eve of the National Day of Thanksgiving is like a family gathering where Moses tells the old stories again, your stories. You hear him speak tonight, long dead but still speaking in Holy Scripture: "Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way" (v 2). You belong to the Lord. This is what the Lord has done for you: He sent you a prophet greater than Moses—Jesus Christ, His Son—to deliver you by His death and resurrection. He brought you out of slavery to sin. He rescued you from the reign of death and the devil. He drowned your enemies in the waters of Baptism and called you to be one of His

people. He has led you year after year through the wilderness of this life, a land in which you are a pilgrim and a stranger. Remember.

But Thanksgiving isn't just about remembering facts. The mental exercise of recalling names and dates might be good enough to pass a grade school history test, but it just won't do for Thanksgiving. I might know all about the Mayflower and 1620, Plymouth Plantation, Squanto, and William Bradford, but no one would say that that means I've remembered Thanksgiving, at least not until I've had multiple servings of my favorite Thanksgiving delicacies and then settled in to watch some football on TV. We each have our own Thanksgiving customs we act out. You see, a proper remembrance of Thanksgiving involves the whole person, not only the mind. The same goes for a wedding anniversary. There's more to remembering an anniversary than just knowing the date. Dinner and flowers are a good start.

So, when Moses says, "Remember," he isn't reeling off a set of historical facts for you to know. He wants your entire life to be one of remembrance, for you to remember the Lord with your head, your heart, and your hand. Through Holy Baptism, you are a member of the heavenly Father's family, and you now remember the Lord your God by living as His child.

To be a child means first of all that you receive what your parents give. You live in their house, you eat at their table, you call to them when you are in need, and you enjoy their things that belong to them. It works the same way for you and me who are children of the Heavenly Father through our adoption into Christ Jesus. Here in this place you remember who you are. This is your Father's house. This altar is His table. You call Him "Father," and His ears hear your cries for mercy. This isn't a onetime thing; it's your life as His child. You remember the Lord by receiving more from Him: more forgiveness and more salvation. It's His delight and joy to give to you, to provide for you, to answer you. He does this not only here but in your own home as well. Your roof, your bed, and your table are His gifts too. The turkey and stuffing and mashed potatoes all come from His hands.

"For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land," we hear in verse seven of our text, And then in verse ten we read, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you." (vv 7, 10)

God gives; you receive. And in receiving, you remember who you are: a beloved child of God. For the time being, though, we are living in a wilderness, and that means that there may be hunger and sickness and tears along the way. (And I would say that in many ways 2020 has been a wilderness year for

everybody!) This Thanksgiving many tables will have less this year than they did last year and it's not only due to social distancing, some of those tables are emptier because a loved one has died. What's more, financial sacrifices have had to be made by many. These are not signs that the Lord has forsaken us, but they do test us.

“Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.” (vv 2-5)

Will you still live as His child even when the way gets rough like the year 2020 has been? Do you see that all that you do have is a gift from Him? Will you fear, love, and trust in Him as your good and gracious God? Remember, we don't live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from His mouth. None of us have starved and you have clothes on your back. The Lord does provide!

The best way that a child shows he remembers his father is to do what his father does, to walk in his ways. “Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and revering him.” (v 6). To be a child of the heavenly Father means to imitate Him: to forgive as He forgives and to love as He loves. You show that you remember the Lord by loving and serving your neighbor. It's real love for real people. We copy the Father's actions. That's how we show that we are His children.

We're always in danger of forgetting who we are. In spiritual matters, as in the rest of life, we are prone to be forgetful and have a selective memory. But Thanksgiving makes us remember, and Moses jogs our memories. He reminds us who we are: The Lord's people, purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. Remember this by receiving His gifts. Listen to His Word and obey it. Come to this Table to eat and drink the body and blood of your Lord Jesus Christ. Remember who you are by living as one who has been redeemed by Christ the crucified. Remember it with your heads, hands, hearts, ears, and mouths. Enjoy and give thanks for all that the Lord has given you, even in- and *especially* in - the year 2020. Happy Thanksgiving!