

24 November 2010
Eve of National Thanksgiving

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Let Us Bless the Lord”
Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

God told the people of Israel through Moses: ***“And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.”***

This verse shows us that thanksgiving wasn't the pilgrims' idea. It had been God's idea long before the pilgrims ever came along. In fact, being religious people, this verse from Deuteronomy may very well have been the pilgrim's inspiration for that first thanksgiving. For like the people of Israel, they had come to a good land; they had been preserved by God. Now it was time to bless the Lord for how He had so blessed them. And it is good and right so to do.

In fact, so good and right is this to do that in the Old Testament, God set up *three* times, three festivals each year for His people to gather together, remember, feast, and give thanks to Him. And they were to do so not as a bunch of individuals, but as a people. Not as many small thanksgivings, but as one big thanksgiving. That *together* they share their joy and *together* they share their blessings, and so draw into their joy those who had little joy, and so those who had much could provide for those who had little. So that *all* would bless the Lord with one voice - rich and poor, high and low, strong and weak, young and old. No one excluded.

And in their celebration, they would *remember*. That was an important part of it. They would remember God's **deliverance**, certainly; how He had delivered them from their slavery in Egypt. They would remember His **provision** - the manna He provided when they were hungry, the water He provided when they were thirsty; the fact that for forty years in the wilderness their clothes did not wear out.

But they would remember more than that; more than these “blessings,” we might say. They would also remember their **sin** and offer sacrifices of confession. For how better to thank the Lord for His forgiveness than by confessing our sin and receiving that forgiveness? They would remember the Lord's **discipline**, and give thanks for that, too. For discipline, though not pleasant, is good. And they would remember **God's Word** that had been given to them. Their times of thanksgiving were times to hear that Word again and remember that ***man does not live by bread alone, but by***

every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

And that is what we have gathered here tonight to do. To join together in thanksgiving as the people of God, to share our joy and share our blessing. And it is not only good and right so to do, it is important. For not everyone will gather tomorrow in thanksgiving. For some, this has been a difficult year. For some, a year of sorrow. Some have no family to gather with. For some, holidays bring pain and sadness and emptiness. You see, that is the problem with secular thanksgivings - not all can take part; not all will.

But for those who have been drawn together in Christ, it is different. For whether or not we gather tomorrow with family and friends, *we gather tonight to remember and bless the Lord.* Like Israel, we remember our Lord's **deliverance**, that through the death and resurrection of Jesus we have been delivered from our slavery to sin, death, and devil. We remember our Lord's **provision**, that He has given us our daily bread, and then some.

And tonight, like the people of Israel, we remembered our **sin**, humbled ourselves in confession, and received the blessing of His forgiveness, thanks be to God. Let us also take some time also to remember His **discipline** - how when things did not always go our way, that perhaps that was a good thing, to strengthen our faith and get us to stop relying on ourselves and look to God for every needed thing. And we have heard again tonight **God's Word**, to sustain us in the journey through the wilderness of this world and life to the land and home God promised to us - our home in heaven with Him.

And yet there is one more blessing we will receive tonight, and that is **the feast of thanksgiving**. The *real* feast of thanksgiving, not of turkey that makes us sleepy, but of our Saviour's Body and Blood which raises us to new life. This is the one big thanksgiving feast where we sit at table with *the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven* and with one voice bless the Lord. For here we who *hunger and thirst for righteousness* eat and drink and are filled - filled with the life of Christ, the forgiveness of Christ, and the love of Christ.

So dear brothers and sisters in Christ, remember the Lord and all His benefits that He has showered upon you this year. Remember that whatever has come upon you this year, the Lord has been with you through it all, working good and working for *your* good. Therefore let us rejoice and be glad together. Let us bless the Lord who does all things well.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.