

FaithPrayers

It is our privilege to pray for you

THANKSGIVING DAY

It is so easy to forget the origins of things. And as we forget, we are sorely tempted to take things for granted, or to forget their intended use. In our culture, Thanksgiving has become one such holiday; an almost unrecognizable interruption between the candy of Halloween and the glitz of the Christmas season. Yet, the harvest celebration is one of the oldest in historical record on all continents.

Succoth is the Jewish Harvest Festival (Festival of Booths), as originally laid out in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. Chuseok is the Korean harvest festival of thanks, a time to remember that we are beneficiaries of the work of those who went before us. Ghana and Nigeria have the Yam Festival. Oktoberfest in Germany began as a celebration of the shepherds and cowherds finally returning safely with their flocks from the mountains, and Erntedanktag was the harvest thanksgiving. In Scotland, Lammas was celebrated by making a loaf of bread from the very first wheat that was cut, and in the Scottish Isles it was celebrated upon the safe return of the fishermen from deep-sea fishing. The Japanese Harvest Festival celebrated the first fruits of

a successful rice harvest. Around the world, most groups of people before our time have instinctively felt a sense of profound gratitude, and of great relief, for a harvest coming in and for yet another year of food. Unfortunately for us, with our year-round supplies of groceries and packages shipped from across the globe, we seem somehow dazed - perhaps even a bit out of touch - with the meaning of a successful harvest.

In America, the English Christian Dissenters (the pilgrims) came with the knowledge of celebrating harvest. However, the Plymouth colony did not initially have enough food to feed the 102 colonists. The Wampanoag Native Americans came to their rescue by providing seeds and teaching them to fish in their new locale. The Native Americans already celebrated harvest feast days of thankfulness, and the 1621 Plymouth feast shared by the Colonists and the Wampanoag was prompted by a good harvest. The early French settlers who came with de Champlain to Canada also shared their harvest celebrations with the people of the First Nations.

While some in New England continued beyond that initial feast

with a version of acknowledging a successful harvest and honoring God for it, there was little continuity for the celebration in the new colonies, and none in the South. It was left to a remarkable woman of history, Sarah Josephia Hale, to step in.

Sarah Hale gives credit to her parents for believing in equal education for both genders at a time when it was not allowed, and particularly to her mother who she said "possessed a mind clear as



THANKSGIVING DAY continued

rock-water, and a most happy talent of communicating knowledge...” Once her mother had taught her all she knew to teach, Sarah’s brother Horatio who, unlike Sarah, could go to college, continued her education. He would return home from Dartmouth with textbooks in hand, and teach his sister himself, for as Sarah wrote later, “he seemed very unwilling that I should be deprived of all his collegiate advantages...” Sarah went on to become an advocate for women’s education, helping to found Vassar College, and a novelist, editor, and one of the more voracious writers in America. She had profound influence on the nation. She was the first to start day nurseries for working women, the first to suggest public playgrounds. She wrote to five presidents - Presidents Taylor, Fillmore, Pierce, Buchanan, and Lincoln, in an attempt to have a day of thanksgiving instituted at Harvest time. An adamant foe of slavery, Sarah felt that a day of national thanksgiving honoring God would forestall the bloodshed she saw coming in the years before the civil war. However it

was only Lincoln, during the civil war, who finally honored her suggestion, and declared the government to close and the nation to honor, on the third Thursday of November, a Thanksgiving Day. Here, just in brief part, is what he said...

The year that is drawing towards its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come... No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God.... to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all

those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union.

By the President: Abraham Lincoln (1863)

His words seem also fitting for today. It seems like a good time to get back in touch. Back in touch with the centuries, with the cultures, and with history, and with people who understood the profound gratitude for Harvest.

As the old Doxology says.... “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow...”

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving!

*Mary Ann Offenstein
Founder, FaithPrayers*

SCRIPTURE OF THE MONTH



While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

~ Genesis 8:22

■ Have a prayer request? Want more information? We can always be contacted on our 24 hour a day, 7 day a week toll-free prayer line.

1-866-515-9406

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www.faithprayers.org

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