

THE GIVING FAMILY
Homily for Thanksgiving
LPC, 11/26/09

Thanksgiving, of course, is a family time. My homily this morning is about a family: the Giving Family. The Giving Family is a huge and varied family, but I will concentrate on the three pillars of this family, starting with Old Man Giving himself.

I say “Old Man Giving”, but I could as easily say, “Mother Giving,” and conjure up a female personification for Giving instead of a male one. Giving of course has no gender. The important thing to remember is that everything begins with Giving.

Our scripture tells us that God started everything with the gift of creation. Our tradition tells us that creation was intentional, benevolent, and creative. The creation myths of other religions often view the world as springing from some accidental, random, or even bellicose action. But creation in the Judeo-Christian world is fundamentally gift from the start.

God’s giving does not stop with creation. Today’s passage from Joel speaks of the abundance of God’s continuing providence. We have in our Prayer Book a prayer that goes, “We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life...” God not only gives us our very being. God not only gives us all of creation in which to live and work and play and delight. God continues to care for us, protecting and sustaining us. And God continues to rain blessings upon us, in the form of provision for our material welfare, and in the loving relationships that we value so much.

That prayer I mentioned goes on. “We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all, for the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thus we acknowledge that God not only gives us life, sustenance and blessings, but God also gives us a promise that all that God’s love will prevail and perfect everything that stands in the way of life, sustenance and blessing.

All this is God’s gift. All we have is the result of God’s giving.

Giving is very prolific. God’s Giving invites a response. One response to God’s Giving is more giving. This, in fact, is what God wants. God wants God’s own generosity to provoke generosity on our part. God wants us to emulate Godself and give. This indeed happens frequently. A man who is recovering from alcoholism thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous becomes himself a sponsor. A family experiencing a windfall tithes the gift and gives to the church. A person who has plenty shares with someone who has little.

This leads me to the second member of the Giving family I wanted to mention: Thanks-Giving. That is why we’re here today, isn’t it? To give thanks. My congregation and my family are sometimes perplexed that I insist on holding a church service on Thanksgiving Day for the few people who show up. I do this because I can’t

see passing on an opportunity to give thanks on a day that's supposed to be dedicated to thanksgiving.

God's giving inspires Thanks-Giving. Being human, we get distracted and forget to give thanks, especially in our culture, which emphasizes entitlement and overindulgence. But happiness lies in being thankful. We should never pass up a chance to be thankful, because if we do we're passing up on an opportunity to be happy.

The third pillar of the Giving family is For-Giving. For Giving, like Thanks-Giving, is a foundational element of happiness. We should never forget that For-giving is first and foremost a form of Giving. For-Giving is an essential member of the Giving Family.

For-Giving comes from God, just as plain Giving. For-Giving rains down on us generously from God as all those other blessings I mentioned earlier. Just as God's Giving inspires our Giving, God intends that God's For-Giving should inspire For-Giving in us.

Giving, Thanks-Giving, and For-Giving: the three pillars of the Giving Family. When your family gathers today, may members of the Giving Family be guests around your table. And may we all remember that any table around which love and bounty is shared, is God's table.