

**HOMILY FOR THANKSGIVING DAY
LITTLE FLOWER CHURCH, BETHESDA, MARYLAND
NOVEMBER 24, 2016**

I want to wish you a very Happy Thanksgiving! I am particularly grateful to Msgr. Vaghi for his hospitality, allowing me to continue this traditional visit of the Apostolic Nuncio to your parish on Thanksgiving Day. This is my first Thanksgiving in the United States and as the personal representative of the Holy Father, I want to assure you of his closeness as you gather with family and friends to give thanks to God. Pope Francis says, “If we can realize that everything is God’s gift, how happy will our hearts be! Everything is his gift. He is our strength!”

He continues: “How often do we say ‘thank you’ in our families? How often do we say ‘thank you’ to those who help us, those close to us, those at our side throughout life? All too often we take everything for granted! This happens with God too! It is easy to approach the Lord to ask for something, but to go and thank him: ‘Well, I don’t need to.’” (HOMILY, SANTA MESSA IN OCCASIONE DELLA GIORNATA MARIANA, 13 OCTOBER 2013)

This difficulty in saying “Thanks be to God” is seen in our Gospel. Ten lepers were healed, but only one returned, “praising God in a loud voice.” As soon as he sees Jesus, he throws himself at His feet to thank him. (Lk 17:16) The evangelist wants to highlight this gesture as a sign of his conversion: a recognition of what Jesus has done for him and a handing over of his life to Him. True healing - full healing – penetrates even to the heart. We could say that this last leper, the Samaritan, was not only *healed*, but he was also *saved*. Perhaps, the other nine lepers thought that their healing was due merely to the fact that they were children of Abraham. The Samaritan, a foreigner, experienced his healing as a grace, as an unmerited gift, that in turn, demanded his love.

It is now about five centuries since the Pilgrims came to Plymouth. They were the “foreigners” who struggled to survive. They were received by the natives, and a native named Squanto, a Catholic, taught the Pilgrims how to tap maple syrup; how to use plants for medicine; how to grow corn; and how to better catch fish. By harvest time, there was abundant food, and the Pilgrims invited their neighboring natives for a meal and a festival. They had reason to give thanks to God, who helped them survive and provided for their needs through the goodness of others. Their giving thanks was a result of God’s goodness and the fruit of an encounter.

In a sense, they anticipated the words of Pope Francis, who speaks of building a culture of encounter:

“Our great challenge is to create a culture of encounter, which encourages individuals and groups to share the richness of our traditions and experiences, to break down walls and to build bridges. The Church in America, as elsewhere, is called to ‘go out’ from its comfort zone and to be a leaven of communion. Communion among ourselves, with our fellow Christians, and with all who seek a future of hope. We need to become ever more fully a community of missionary disciples, filled with love of the Lord Jesus and enthusiasm for the spread of the Gospel.” (Video message to the General Assembly of the USCCB, 14-17 November 2016)

Today is a day for communion – to be together. It is day to give thanks to Almighty God – just as the Pilgrims did – for the many blessings in our life: our family, friends, freedom, and for this beautiful country, with its abundance. Above all, we thank God for His Beloved Son, Jesus, who came to heal and to save us, and who feeds us with the Bread of Life, the Eucharist, a word which means Thanksgiving!