***Thanksgiving***

There is Room at the Table - and it is a Very Long One

Growing up in a relatively small nuclear family, experiencing a large gathering at the Thanksgiving table was not our reality. Over these fifty years of ordained ministry, that reality has changed…significantly. Marrying into a large family, experiencing Thanksgiving life in the context of parish life, with a Mass on the Eve of Thanksgiving and a Mass on Thanksgiving Day, expanded my experience immensely. I suppose one could say my Thanksgiving experience was “Altared.”

The Table in the Sanctuary became the Thanksgiving table, where people with large families and people with no families could find a place at the Table. At one point in parish life, we had parish wide Thanksgiving dinners where after the Thursday morning High Mass, people gathered in every room in the parish hall and education rooms to gather, play games, sing, watch football games, eat, or just observe. Being brought up in an ethnic environment we incorporated the ancient tradition of handing a small loaf of bread (obviously not consecrated!) to people in the church at the end of Mass and each person was asked to break and distribute the bread at their table, and to take a loaf (or more) to those who had no bread, perhaps no family, and maybe no one with whom to sit at their table.

Now after 57 years of marriage, and 50 years as a priest and 30 years as a bishop, I have the advantage and privilege of looking back at the many tables I have seen in the homes of many people. But the one Table that continues to call me is the one where Bread and Wine are placed, and the words of Jesus are uttered, and the people continue to be fed. In our own Chapel at our house, the Altar is from a Chapel in the church where my wife and I were married. The church has sadly closed several decades ago, but we were given that Altar, one that I first served at in 1964. That Table has seen many hungry people, most of whom are now at the Banquet Table in Heaven. A priest once told me, in humor, that he recalls a sign on a road that said, “Roadside Table 1000 feet.” He pondered that for a moment and said, “I think that must be the longest table I will ever see.” This Thanksgiving we will sit at tables that may be new or may be Antiques. They may be empty or they may be surrounded by many. There may be little or no food on the table, or it may be filled, but just as the loaf of bread I have blessed on Thanksgiving is designed to remind us of the Bread of Life, so may each table hearken back to that Table at the Last Supper. The Eucharist (Greek for Thanksgiving) is a foretaste of what is ahead, and also what has been for over 2000 years. It is a very long table.

This Thanksgiving take out one moment to thank God for people who have sat at the table with you in the past, and give thanks to Him for the fact that His Son has prepared a place for you…at the Table.