

Erma Bombeck wrote: This is the holiday when women all over the country get up at 4 a.m., arm-wrestle a naked turkey, stand over a toaster trying to turn stale bread into fresh dressing, and spend 10 hours making a meal that will take 12 minutes to inhale. Every woman is expected to emulate the spirit of those colonists who in 1621 gave thanks for surviving 1620. Women who took three days to prepare a feast over an open fire. Cooks who made succotash for the entire state of Massachusetts and never asked what their country could do for them when everyone pushed away from the table. Women who made culinary history.

If ever I need a historian to come up with an expose of what the first Thanksgiving was really like, I need it now. I need to know that the whole story was a fairytale. As I sit here drinking coffee out of a measuring cup, because all the cups I own are on the dining room table. I must know the truth. Living the myth is taking its toll. Tell me Mrs. Brewster sent the kids out in the morning for an egg corn McMeal breakfast at McBradford's and told them if they set foot in her kitchen before the turkey was done, she'd kill them. Tell me the pumpkin pies that she could make with her eyes closed....turned out to be a beverage.

Isn't it possible Mrs. Armbruster spent 6 months getting together all the food they would need for that crowd and then discovered that morning she didn't have a grain of salt in the house? The pictures of the first Thanksgiving look so idyllic as we see an Indian embracing the white man in a show of peace and harmony. Wasn't there a disgruntled hostess somewhere who said, "If Running Deer wants to smoke, he's going to have to go outside and do it."

There's just so much they never told us. Did they run out of napkins and have to use the cocktail squares that said, "These aren't hors d'oeuvres....it's dinner!" Did a guest come to the cook just before he was to sit down and tell her venison made him break out in large bumps all over his body and his breathing became shallow?

My husband, the historian, just informed me that the first Thanksgiving was not held in November, but July. "Why did they change it?" I asked. "It was originally supposed to be in November, but it took the turkey an extra 8 months to get done," he smiled. "We're going to a restaurant next year," I announced. (adapted from "Aggravations of Pilgrim's feast not mentioned," Syndicated Column for 21 November 1984)

OK, down to business. This is my favorite holiday of the year – and this is one of my favorite masses. Because there's no distraction or disappointment or hype of Christmas – and not all the exhaustion of Holy Week that comes with Easter in my line of work. And everyone who comes to this celebration wants to be here (unless your mother threatened you with no turkey unless you showed up – God bless her! -- but you'll get over it!) Regardless, I'm happy you're here and that we have this moment to break our normal work-and-school-weeks and come together to remind ourselves what is important. Like God. Faith. Family. All my favorite things. And if you are not with your family this year, but with friends-who-become-family we still count that as a great blessing – that someone has invited us into their lives.

In his book, *THE GOD INSTINCT*, Tom Stella shares this story: A number of men who made their living as porters were hired one day to carry a huge load of supplies for a group on safari. Their loads were unusually heavy and the trek through the jungle was on a rough path. Several days into the journey they stopped, unshouldered their loads, and refused to go on. No pleas, bribes, or threats, worked in terms of persuading them to go on. Asked why they couldn't continue, they answered: "We can't go on; we have to wait for our souls to catch up with us."

That happens to us too in life, except mostly we never wait for our souls to catch up. We continue on without them, sometimes for years. What's meant by this? Mostly it means that we struggle to be in the present moment, to be inside our own skins, to be aware of the richness of our own experience. Mostly our experiences aren't very soulful because we aren't very present to them.

At different times in my life, I've kept a journal, a diary of sorts. I've never been very good at it, but it keeps getting recommended to me through various sources and I start the practice again. My intent in keeping a journal is to record the deeper things that I'm aware of throughout each day; but mostly what I end up actually writing down is a simple chronology of my day, more a daybook, a bare, no-frills, recounting of what I did from hour to hour. My diaries are not at all like Anne Frank's Diary, Dag Hammarskjöld's MARKINGS, or Henri Nouwen's GENESEE DIARY. My journals resemble more what you might get from a schoolboy describing his day at school, a simple chronology of what happened. Yet when I go back and read an account of what I did each day, I'm always amazed at how rich and full life was on those days, except that I wasn't much aware of it at the time. While actually living those days, mostly I was struggling to get my work done, to stay healthy, to meet expectations, to carve out some moments of friendship and recreation amid the pressures of the day, and to get to bed at a reasonable hour. There wasn't a lot of soul there, just a lot of routine, work, and hurry.

I suspect that this is not atypical. Most of us, I would guess, live most of our days not very aware of how rich our lives are, forever leaving our souls behind: For example, many is the woman who gives 10, 15 or more years of her life to bearing and raising children, with all that entails, tending constantly to someone else's needs, getting up at night to nurse and diaper a child, spending 24 hours a day on constant alert, sacrificing all leisure time, and putting a career and personal creativity on hold. And yet too often that same woman, later on, looks back on those years and wishes she could relive them – but now, in a more soulful way, more deliberately aware of how wonderful and privileged it is to do precisely those things she did with so little drama and so much exhaustion. Years later, looking back, she sees how rich and precious her experience was and how, because of the burden and stress, how little her soul was present then to what she was actually undergoing.

This is but one of hundreds of examples. We've all read accounts wherein someone shares what he or she would do differently if they had life to live over again. Mostly these stories rework the same motif: Given another chance, I would try to enjoy it more the next time, that is, I would try to keep my soul more-present and more-aware. *I would pay closer attention to it – all of it.*

For most of us, I fear, our souls will only catch up with us when, finally, we are in a retirement home, with diminished health, energy, and opportunity to work. It seems we need to first lose something before we fully appreciate it. We tend to take life, health, energy, and work for granted, until they are taken away from us. Only after the fact do we realize how rich our life has been and how little of those riches we drank in at the time.

If we live long enough, our souls eventually do catch up with us, but it would be good if we didn't wait until we were in the retirement home for this to happen. Like the porters who dropped their loads and stopped, we need regularly to stop and wait for our souls to catch up. This is one of the great gifts of the Thanksgiving holiday. Not only do we have a day – we have 4 days – provided we don't make a mad dash off Christmas shopping tomorrow. The fact that you have come to celebrate this Mass means that you know of the value of stopping. Of giving thanks. Of recognizing that there is a wonderfully loving God hovering over and in it all. We have a couple of days to pause and let our souls catch up. This Mass is but one of those moments. I invite you to extend them over the next several days – then weeks, months and years. Take some

time at the table today to ask: “What was the highlight of this past year?” “What is your favorite memory?” Something that causes us all to pause for a moment and give thanks for the amazing, incredible gift of life itself, with all its joys and all its sorrows.

Early on in his priesthood, when Pope Francis was in charge of a school, he would at a certain point each day have the public address system cut in and interrupt the work that was going on in each classroom with this announcement: *Take a moment to be grateful. Set your horizon. Take stock of your day.*

We all need, regularly, to lay down our burdens for a minute so our souls can catch up with us. And thank the God who is behind it all. Thanks for spending these minutes here at Mass. HAPPY THANKSGIVING! THANKS FOR COMING! AND THANKS FOR ALL THAT YOU DO FOR ST ANDREW’S – AND BEYOND. (adapted from Ronald Rolheiser, “Forever Being Ahead of our Souls”, posting of 11/20/2018) (SONG?)