

OK, we'll do a typical call and response as part of the homily. I'll say GOD IS GOOD. And you'll respond ALL THE TIME. Then I'll say ALL THE TIME! And you'll say GOD IS GOOD. (Try it)

I knew you were an LG parish – that is LITURGICALLY GIFTED!

A brother tells the story: One year at Thanksgiving, my mom went to my sister's house for the traditional feast. Knowing how gullible my sister is, my mom decided to play a trick. She told my sister that she needed something from the store. Once my sister had left, my mom took the turkey out of the oven, removed the stuffing, stuffed it into a Cornish hen, and inserted it into the turkey, and re-stuffed the turkey. She then placed both birds back in the oven.

When it was time for dinner, my sister pulled the turkey out of the oven and proceeded to remove the stuffing. When her serving spoon hit something, she reached in and pulled out the little bird.

With a look of total shock on her face, my mother exclaimed, "Patricia – you've cooked a pregnant bird!" At the reality of this horrifying news, my sister started to cry.

It took the family 2 hours to convince her that turkeys lay eggs! I won't tell you what color her hair is.....but you can guess.

Oh – and one piece of advice – DEFINITELY bring up politics at your Thanksgiving Dinner – it'll save you a ton of money on Christmas gifts! I'll pass on other helpful holiday tips as appropriate. Always trying to help!

First, a word about hospitality. Whether you are hosting dinner today – or are being hosted – we will all be caught up in the act of hospitality. Hospitality has profound spiritual aspects. Hebrews 13:2 says "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." And who is stranger than family? And do we ever think of our brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, moms and dads and children – as ANGELS? I used to tell the Newman students at UNC that I didn't think they were devils – but angels – with an incredible capacity for beer! Since this Thanksgiving I'm a guest and not the host – I'm reminding the family now that I'm an angel – and expect to be treated as such. FAT CHANCE!

Prayer is a part of hospitality. The church is but the historical development of the primal church, which is the home. The home or the 'domestic church' is the place of prayer, sacrifice, worship and spiritual life. The parish church is intended to be the communal gathering of the domestic churches that surround it. When our homes cease to be domestic churches, then the vitality of the local church is short-lived.

Anywhere in the home is proper for prayer – but 3 places stand out as cardinal points – the table, the bedroom and the threshold. The bedroom is obvious, due to its place at the beginning and end of the day – times we thank God for the gift of a new day and the opportunities/challenges/blessings it presents – and then an opportunity to thank God at the end for all that the day has been – or not been. The bedroom is also the place where a couple's intimacy gives them the most God-like reality on the entire planet – they participate in the act of creation, unique to God alone. The threshold or front door might not be quite as obvious. The prayer of the front door is one of the most universal and ancient of all prayers, and its name is hospitality. We who live in a mostly non-spiritual culture consider the door of a home to be a necessity, but our ancient ancestors considered it as a holy place and a sacred shrine. To believe today that the threshold of our home is a shrine might be considered quaint. To consider the most common, daily actions like saying 'hello' and good-bye' as prayerful and holy would be thought of as odd. Yet, to invite friends to dinner or to

receive an invitation to enter another's home is held sacred by all peoples. In former ages, people believed that the gods, hidden in disguise, came to visit as strangers. For us as Christians, we reflect both the sentiment of Hebrews that we might be entertaining angels – or as in Matthew 25: “As long as you do it for one of these least ones, you do it for me,” we entertain Christ. I’m reminding the family that I’m with of that too. Hey, this might really work out well for me today! GOD IS GOOD! ALL THE TIME! ALL THE TIME! GOD IS GOOD!

But our main focus today is prayer around the table. Thanksgiving is all about getting our dysfunctional family and friends under the same roof and hoping the police don’t get called! And as Oscar Wilde wrote, “After a good dinner, one can forgive anybody, even one’s own relations.” The heart of hospitality is creating space for those moments when we may speak those deeper sentiments: “This is something I love about you,” or “This is why I love being with you,” or “This is what you have taught me.” A slower meal when no one needs to rush off to something else affords us that rare less hectic pace when we can tell the people we love exactly why we love them – what they bring to our lives, why our lives are richer because they are in it. We might have to take a risk of saying tender, meaningful things out loud in front of everyone, in front of our friends and families, trusting that those words would travel down to a very deep part of someone we care about.

Sometimes food is the end and sometimes it’s a means to an end, and sometimes we don’t know which it is until it happens. The food and the table and the laughter create a sacred space, a place to give someone the gift of heartfelt words. That’s what this day can be about – sacred space and words of meaning. Well, that and lots of whipped cream on the pumpkin pie! (adapted from Shauna Niequist, BREAD & WINE, p. 176-177). GOD IS GOOD! ALL THE TIME! ALL THE TIME! GOD IS GOOD!

Second, a word about food. You know this is the ONE day of the year that big thighs are a good thing! But seriously, food is the thread of life: we eat at funerals; we eat at weddings; we eat at graduation and baptism and first communion and confirmation parties; we eat on holidays. When we are pensive or hurting or lonely or thinking, we begin to look for ‘comfort food,’ simple foods that give more warmth to the heart than nourishment for the body. Remember how impossible it was to find yeast last year? In the midst of the pandemic, we craved the premier smell of the kitchen – home baked bread! William Gladstone said “If you are cold, tea will warm you, If you are heated, it will cool you. If you are depressed, it will cheer you. If you are excited, it will calm you.”

Food is one of the great acts of love. It says, I am here to support you, sustain you, share life with you and help you.” “The tea pot is on,” someone wrote, “the cups are waiting/Favorite chairs anticipating/ No matter what I have to do/ My friend, there’s always time for you.” I’ve always loved the line from Napoleon Bonaparte, who said of champagne “In victory you deserve it; in defeat, you need it!” Food is what enables us to open ourselves – unguarded and unboundaried – in ways no other act of life can possibly do.

Nourishment is the medicine of the home. Long before alternative medicines or nutritionists, Hippocrates wrote, “if we could give every individual the right amount of nourishment and exercise, not too little and not too much, we would have found the safest way to health.” (adapted from Joan Chittister, THE ART OF LIFE – MONASTIC WISDOM FOR EVERY DAY, p. 32) And for us as Catholics, a bit of bread and a sip of wine announces to us that the Christ, the Savior, is in our midst, even at our table. GOD IS GOOD! ALL THE TIME! ALL THE TIME! GOD IS GOOD!

Third, the grace of it all. I love this day because it reminds us to stop. To reflect. To give thanks for all that God has done – and continues to do for us. Even when times can be difficult. Even in the midst of loss –

of health, or family members, or job, or marriage. There are blessings even in these challenging things for those of us who follow a Master who told us to pick up a cross and follow in His footsteps.

Thanksgiving reminds us that God never stops blessing us, and has blessed us in the simple fact that we are here in these United States. We all won the lottery – just by being here – even in the midst of our dysfunctional politics and struggles to come to consensus on so many issues. Our faith reminds us that God remains in charge and that God wins in the end.

So at our tables today, and hopefully every day, we pause and give thanks. It doesn't matter that we might get held hostage by grace sayers who use the opportunity to work the room, like the Church Lady. But mostly, people simply say thank you – we understand how far short we fall, how selfish we can be, how self-righteous, what brats. And yet God has given us this marvelous meal.

We're in it for the pause, the quiet thanks for love and for our blessings, before the shoveling begins. For a minute, our stations are tuned to a broader, richer radius. We're acknowledging that this food didn't just magically appear: someone grew it, ground it, bought it, baked it; wow.

We say thank you for the miracle that we have stuck together all these years, in spite of it all; that we have each other's backs, and our whacky and sometimes downright funny companionship. We say thank you for the plentiful and outrageous food, and for alka seltzer and TUMS too. We pray to be mindful of the needs of others. We savor these moments out of time, when we are conscious of love's presence, of God's great abiding generosity to our dear and motley family and friends, and for these holy moments of gratitude. And it is all gift, all grace. GOD IS GOOD! ALL THE TIME! ALL THE TIME! GOD IS GOOD!