

THANKSGIVING AND THE WORD

Rt. Rev. Willard D. Pendleton

Of the four great festivals that we celebrate every year Thanksgiving is the oldest. For thousands of years before people celebrated the Nineteenth of June, or even Christmas or Easter, they celebrated the festival of Thanksgiving. In fact, in the time of Adam and Eve, people celebrated the festival of the harvest. You remember the story of how Cain and Abel, the children of Adam and Eve, brought the first fruits of the field and of the flocks to the Lord as an offering. That was the festival of Thanksgiving. You might also know that many years ago the Israelites held a great feast called the Ingathering, when they gathered in all the fruit and all the grain from the fields, and then they brought it to the Lord. And if you had lived in Jerusalem at the time of King David or King Solomon, you might have seen a great sight. You might have seen all the tribes of Israel going to Jerusalem, driving their flocks and herds before them, and carrying on their shoulders grapes and pomegranates, and figs and grain, bringing all these things as offerings of thanksgiving to the Lord.

Now you know that it is important to give thanks to the Lord, but have you ever wondered why? Why was it that King David once said, "It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord"? Why is it a good thing? Perhaps you can answer that question for yourselves. Let us suppose that for two or three days you had no water to drink, and then someone brought you some water. You would thank him, wouldn't you? Or let us suppose that, for four or five days, you had no food to eat, and then someone brought you food. You would be grateful, and you would thank him. But you know, children, that it is the Lord who gives us our food and water. It is true that people take seeds, plant them in the ground, and when the tender shoots come up they protect them, and cultivate the ground and remove the weeds, and harvest the crop. But who is it that gives us the seeds to plant? Who is it that gives us the ground in which to plant the seeds? Who is it that sends the sun that warms the plants? And who is it that sends the rain that waters the plants? It is the Lord, isn't it? It is the Lord who causes things to grow, and it is the Lord who sends the rain that gives us water to drink. But not only that. Think of all the other things that the Lord gives us—even the air that we breathe. If we didn't have air we would die in a moment. He also gives us the wood and the stone with which we build our homes. He gives us the things with which we make our clothes. So we have many, many things for which we should be thankful to the Lord.

Now there is one gift that I have not mentioned, and this is the most wonderful gift of all, far more wonderful than all the other things that the Lord has given us. What is this wonderful gift? It is the Word. You can understand this if you stop and think for a moment. Let us suppose that we did not have the Lord's Word. If we didn't, you would not know anything about the Lord at all. You wouldn't even know that there is a God. If we didn't have the Lord's Word you

wouldn't know anything about heaven; you wouldn't know why you were born on earth; you wouldn't know what you were here for; you wouldn't know what the purpose of life is. And there is another thing you wouldn't know—you wouldn't know the difference between good and evil, or between right and wrong. Then you would be like an animal, because animals don't know the difference between good and evil. This is in order for them. But without the Word, people would be like savage animals, and we would soon destroy each other.

This is why the Word is the most important gift of all. For it is from the Word that we learn what is truth. In many, many places in the Word truth is likened to a tiny seed planted in the ground. Do you remember the parable of the sower? The sower went out and sowed his seed. Some seed fell by the wayside, some fell on stony ground, and some fell among thorns and thickets, so of course that seed didn't grow. But some seed fell on good ground. To understand this story we must know that the Lord is the sower. The truths of His Word are the seeds that He sows. And what is the good ground? It is our minds. Our minds are where we receive the truths of the Lord's Word—those tiny seeds of truth. And, if we love that seed, if we love the Lord's Word, if we love the truths that He teaches us, what will we do? We will keep the seed, we will protect it, cherish it, and cultivate it in our minds, just as we keep and cultivate the natural seeds that we put into the ground.

Now, let me ask you, why do we cherish these seeds? Is it just so that we may *know* about the Lord? No, although that is very important, there is a deeper reason and much more important reason. It is so these seeds of truth will bring forth fruit, just as the seeds in the ground grow and bring forth fruit. But what is the fruit that truth brings forth in our minds? It is good. If you didn't know what truth was, you couldn't do good. For to do good we must first know what is true. That is why the Lord has given us the Word, not just so we will *know* the truth, but so that we may *do* what is good. For the Lord knows something that we frequently forget: true happiness is found in making other people happy; no one who is really selfish can be happy; selfishness is unhappiness.

The Lord wants everyone to be happy. More than anything else He wants us to make use of the truths He has given us. This is the real harvest, the harvest that the Lord loves more than the things that grow in the field. For the Lord loves the spiritual harvest of the good things that people do for each other, and to live according to truth is to do what is good. This is what we should remember on Thanksgiving Day, for Thanksgiving is a day of remembrance, a day set aside to think of the Lord and all the good things that He has done for us and to thank Him. And let us, in turn, do good to others so that all people may be happy in the Lord's harvest. *Amen.*