Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



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November 25, 2019

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Perhaps, this year, Thanksgiving Day can be more than having a good meal, watching the football games or finding the best sales. Integrate into your plans a time to reflect on the key elements of the story of Thanksgiving. Let Thanksgiving Day really be a special day this year.

One of the stories offered in Wikipedia on the origin of Thanksgiving here in the United States caught my attention. Although it is a familiar one, I found the way it was expressed offered a framework for a very timely reflection as we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving 2019 here in the United States — or anywhere in the world!

I invite you to use this reflection for yourself and perhaps with those with whom you celebrate.

Process

Take time to quiet yourself and then slowly read the story and begin to reflect on the questions. Pause whenever something catches the attention of your heart. Stay with that for a few moments. Then continue. If you are praying this with others, you may want to stop after each section to share your insights.

The Thanksgiving Story:

"The 1621 Plymouth feast and thanksgiving were prompted by a good harvest, which the Pilgrims celebrated with Native Americans, who helped them pass the last winter by giving them food in the time of scarcity."

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A good harvest means that seeds were sown, and plants tended throughout the year.

What did you plant and what are you harvesting this year?

- Were there the seeds of contemplative sitting that blossomed into a deeper dropping down into the spaciousness of the Divine within you?
- Did you plant the seeds of listening to those who differ from you so that at this Thanksgiving table you can really hear those voices and receive them without

judgment?
- Were the skills of dialogue planted and watered so that while you hold your own beliefs and values you can enter the space between each other and ask curiosity and generative questions?

What seeds were planted and are part of your harvest?

The Pilgrims celebrated with the Native Americans who helped them passed the last winter.

With whom do you celebrate? Who has helped you passed your last winter?

- As you gather, whom do you call your family? Do you bring to your table those who are not known personally but upon whose shoulders you stand? Do you celebrate the Native Americans without whom the European ancestors may have perished? Do you celebrate the various waves of immigration which brought the rest of our ancestors without which you may not be here?
- From whom have you received help and assistance through your last winter? Who was there for you as you grew more frustrated with the polarization in our country? In the church? Where did you find comfort in your grief? In your suffering?

With whom do you celebrate, and who helped you passed your last winter?

The Native Americans gave the Pilgrims food in their time of scarcity.

What do you have that others need? What is the food needed at this time of scarcity?

- What do you have that is needed by others? Is it money to buy food or clothing? Is it time to be present, to visit, to listen, to do everyday tasks? Is it an openness to receive what is being offered to you?
- What is the scarcity in your life that needs to be fed? Is it the absence of love, friendship, or community? Is it a lack of hope for the future? Is it a feeling of malaise that things are out of control? Is it not experiencing God's presence?
- What is the scarcity in the life of the community that needs to be fed? Is it the lack of compassion for those suffering throughout our world? Is it keeping things separate and not seeing how everything is united and part of a whole? Is it not caring for the health and well-being of Earth?

What do you have that others need, and what is the scarcity that needs "food" in order to get past this winter?

When you have finished, pause. Take a few minutes simply to be with your reflections. Then offer a prayer of thanks to God, present since the beginning, sowing seeds of love and compassion, offering food throughout times of scarcity and celebrating with all creation.

[Nancy Sylvester is founder and director of the Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue. She served in leadership of her own religious community, the Sister Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, Michigan, as well as in the presidency of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Prior to that she was National Coordinator of Network, the national Catholic social justice lobby. You may be interested in the current ICCD program, Enter the Chaos: Engage the Differences to Make a Difference. For information go to www.iccdinstitute.org]