

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
Thanksgiving Day (USA)

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.²

“And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein; That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name there. And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the country which the LORD sware unto our fathers for to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the LORD thy God. And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression: And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God: And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the LORD thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.³

“Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest [SHOW-est] thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

A woman goes shopping and has a carton of eggs placed on the top of a bag. She returns home to her 10th-floor apartment. The front door is by a balcony that overlooks the ten-story drop. There is a railing, and a table by the railing, and the woman puts the bag of groceries down on the table to get out her keys. She jostles the bag and the cover to the carton of eggs comes loose, and an egg rolls out over the railing.

The egg begins to drop. An egg is falling: ten stories, nine, eight, and down it goes. Before it hits the ground, a woman pushing a baby carriage on the sidewalk below comes under the egg, directly under the egg. The baby is covered with soft blankets, and the egg lands on them, without breaking. What is the statistical likelihood of the baby carriage coming under the falling egg at precisely that moment?

For all that is wondrous and mysterious in our lives, we give thanks to God, because we see His hand in our lives. We see His Providence, His provision for us, in little things like the falling egg, and in big things, such as His provision for our salvation, through His Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

We are thankful for our Country, and our greatness in the world that God has inspired. When in England at a large conference, Colin Powell was asked by the Archbishop of Canterbury if our plans for Iraq were just an example of empire-building by George Bush. Powell answered by saying, “Over the years, the United States has sent many of its fine young men and women into great peril to fight for freedom beyond our borders. The only land we ever asked for in return was enough to bury our dead.” It became very quiet in the room.

In the American Book of Common Prayer, we have a section called “Family Prayer”⁴ which appeared in the first edition of our Prayer Book in 1789. The prayer entitled “The Thanksgiving”⁵ was composed in 1705 by Edmund Gibbon, who became the Bishop of London. In that role, he looked after the Church of England in the American colonies until his death in 1748. He was a friend of John and Charles Wesley and he encouraged the conversion of Negroes on colonial plantations.

It has been said that his 18th-Century piety is a “serene and searching eloquence ... that combines, with consummate art, deep personal feeling and apt expression of corporate love and need.” One of the phrases in Gibbon’s prayer can be ap-

plied to the falling egg and to Colin Powell’s remarks: God’s “continual care and watchful providence over us.”

The Book of Common Prayer is a treasure, and we are grateful for it. It is one of the three masterpieces of the English language, along with the King James Bible and the works of William Shakespeare. The Book of Common Prayer is like the egg—it fell—it was banned in England in the 17th century for nearly 16 years when the Puritans took over under Oliver Cromwell. With the Restoration, the Episcopate, the Prayer Book, and the Monarchy were brought back. The egg was saved.

The Pilgrims and Puritans were not happy in the Church of England. Many of them settled in Massachusetts. They were God-fearing folk, who were acutely aware of God’s providence and deliverance from deadly perils. Those who followed them kept their robust trust in God; their sense of divine providence was keen.

Soon after the first Thanksgiving, Roger Williams founded Rhode Island and named the first settlement *Providence*. *Providence*, Rhode Island. Every founding document in the early days of our Republic, for the states, and for the Federal government, explicitly recognized God, His laws, His guiding hand, His providence, His blessings to us.

Today we continue that great tradition. We ascribe all our blessings to God, we thank him, and we pray to be a country whose God is the Lord. Amen.

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November 24, 2011

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for Special Occasions* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Deuteronomy 26:1-11 (KJV).

³ St. John 6:26-35 (KJV).

⁴ Page 585 *ff.*

⁵ Page 591.

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