

## "THE SPIRIT OF THANKSGIVING"

TEXT: "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts  
with praise."  
Psalm 100: 4, 5

In one of his books, Fulton Oursler, introduces us to his old negro nurse whose name was Anna Maria Cecilia Sophia Virginia Avalon Thessalonians. She was born a slave on the eastern shore of Maryland, and attended not only his own birth, but also the birth of his mother. Fulton Oursler pays this old negro nurse a wonderful tribute for he tells us that it was this woman who first taught him the great lesson of a thankful heart.

"I remember her," he said, "as she sat at the kitchen table in our house with her hard, old brown hands folded, with her black eyes lifted to the ceiling, and the husky old voice saying, 'Much obliged, Lord....much obliged for my vittles.'" "Anna", I said, "What's a vittle?" And she replied, "It's what I got to eat and drink,.....that's vittles". "But Anna".... wouldn't you get your vittles whether you thanked the Lord or not." "Sure" she said, "But it makes everything taste so much better to be thankful."

Fulton Oursler goes on to tell us that there came a time when he passed through a very bitter and trying experience. He points out to us that it was the memory of Anna's thankful spirit that kept him going. It served as a source of inspiration. It gave him a handle with which to work. Finally word came to him one day that Anna was dying. He hurried to her bedside, and found her with her hands folded in prayer and pain, and wondered what she would find to be thankful for in such a time.

"She opened her eyes, smiled, and the last words she spoke were, 'Much obliged Lord....much obliged for so many fine friends!'"

And so it is that often a weary and lonely way in life may be lighted by the glory of a thankful spirit. I think it's well for us to stop occasionally and say with Anna, "Much obliged Lord, for my vittles". "Much obliged Lord for so many fine friends". "Much obliged Lord for so many blessings....." I think that we would agree with Anna that "things do taste so much better when we're thankful".

Earlier this week, I asked to be excused from a social engagement on the ground that I had to prepare a sermon for Thanksgiving Sunday. A friend happened to suggest that I preach an old sermon. Well, frankly the thought had never occurred to me. First of all, I haven't any old sermons on this theme tucked away in the file. And in the second place, if I did have some sermons on this theme, I'm sure they would not be suitable. The reason is quite plain, for while the foreground of Thanksgiving is the same from year to year, the background does change. The foreground, composed of family dinner parties and ritual observances of the occasion, is more or less the same each year. But the background of national and world events is not the same. It changes from year to year. This year, in a very real sense, it is

composed of two contrasting factors: PROSPERITY AND PERIL. The condition of the country has never been more prosperous. At the same time, the condition of the world has never been more perilous. At home, we're riding high, wide, and handsome. But in the world, we appear to be riding for a fall. When I seriously began to consider just what a Christian minister should say to his people on Thanksgiving Sunday, 1957, I came to the conclusion that there were three things, or at least three things, which he should say concerning the situation we find our selves in. We're surrounded by an immediate circle of prosperity, but at the same time we're surrounded by an even wider circle of peril.

GRATEFUL FOR OUR PROSPERITY

The first thing I would say is that our prosperity is not something to be proud of but something for which we should be grateful. We live in the most richly

blessed land on the face of the earth.

If we have greater wealth than other nations, it is largely because we have been given a greater abundance of raw materials. If we have more food, and fewer people starving than the other nations of the world, it is largely because we have more land, and the land that we have is fertile land. If we are able to maintain a high standard of living for our people, it is largely because we have greater resources, more raw materials, and greater wealth from which to draw. To be sure, we have developed these raw materials. We have made the very most of our brains and our ingenuity, but using all these at their maximum capacity, we could not have produced what we now have if we had been given a dry, barren land to begin with.

And moreover as a country, we are young and strong. We have never been bombed. We have never experienced starvation. Certainly these are things for which we should be thankful. I'm sure that one of the things that every Christian minister would encourage his people to do next Thursday is to say with all their hearts and minds:

"All that we have is thine. Bless it to our use, and us to Thy service.."

We live in a great country. We live in a land of freedom. We live in a land of opportunity. For this we should be very grateful. We also live in a land of prosperity and privilege. And with privilege there comes responsibility. This leads into the second thing that I would like to say on this Thanksgiving Sunday, 1957.

OUR PROSPERITY MUST BE SHARED.

With privilege there comes a responsibility. And as a nation it is our responsibility to share our prosperity with others. And it's not unrealistic to say that unless we do this, our own prosperity could destroy us. This I think we will do as we have done in the past.

As a people, we are notoriously generous. We respond quickly to human need. It's safe to say, I think, that we have organized more relief agencies in the short time that we have been a nation than any other people in the history of the world. When there's a disaster, whether it is home or abroad, our sympathies turn immediately to the people who are in trouble. Our pocketbooks are opened wide. Our gifts begin to flow in their direction. It was true when San Francisco was shaken by an earthquake in 1906. It was true when Japan was shaken by an earthquake in 1923. It was true in 1920 when Rufus Jones and

the small group of American Friends managed to give one million German children one meal a day while Germany was under a blockade. We all remember the Bundles For Britain. We remember the enthusiastic way that we have supported that amazing agency called CARE. We remember how the people of this country within the past year reached out with hospitality toward the refugees who fled from Hungary. Because we have always made this sort of response, I'm sure that we shall continue to do so.

But the day has not yet come when we can sit back and let the rest of the world go by. The day has not yet come when the need no longer exists for us to share our prosperity with the other nations of the world. Those of you who have traveled beyond the borders of this country have undoubtedly had your eyes opened, as I have had my eyes opened, to the great needs that still exist. The scenes of poverty, and sickness and unrest that our eyes have fallen upon will continue to haunt us for many days to come. It's no exaggeration to say that two thirds of the world still goes to bed hungry at night.

THE GREAT BLESSING OF FREEDOM.

We need to be grateful for our prosperity. Our prosperity must be shared. The third thing that

I would like to emphasize is perhaps even more important than the two preceding thoughts. It has to do with perhaps our greatest blessing, the gift of freedom. Certainly our prosperity has been built upon the foundation stone of freedom. Sometimes we get a little careless about this gift of freedom. We take it for granted. We sometimes forget about all of those battles that have been fought, and the lives that have been sacrificed in order for us to do as we would like to do, to say what we would like to say, to worship where we would like to worship, to vote for the person for whom we would like to vote. We sometimes become careless concerning this great blessing of freedom.

In Rushville's East Cemetery, at the foot of a fifteen foot granite cross there is an open book marking the grave of a man who believed devoutly in America. On the open face of that book there are engraved some of Wendell Wilkie's own words:

"I believe in America because in it we are free. We are free to choose our government. We are free to speak our own minds. We are free to observe different religions. We are generous with our freedom and share our rights with those who disagree with us. Freedom is an indivisible word. We must have faith that the welfare of one is the welfare of all."

Thanksgiving is a good time to celebrate and to remember the kind of freedom that our forefathers sought. It is a precious gift. We need to be careful that our cry for freedom however does not degenerate in to some kind of license. Free religion, certainly....and then never darken the doors of a church! Free enterprise, to be sure....as long as it gives the strong a chance to exploit the weak. Free schools....surely.....then pay the teachers a poor salary. Free press, why certainly.....then boycott a paper that offers a different opinion. Free speech, by all means.....and then refusing hearing to the other side.

Freedom, as you know, is hard to win, but it is so easy to lose.

As we think about the freedom that we share in today, it is well to consider who was responsible for it. We must never forget that it is ours because of men who believed in God first. And it is lost as men lose their faith. Our Pilgrim Fathers may have had their faults, but the freedom they believed in came from their faith in God!

It's been pointed out to us that:

"The same revolutionary spirit produced vastly different results in France and in America. In France, liberty became license, the Age of Reason brought on the reign of Terror, and the end was a Dictator Napoleon who left all Europe staggering in ruins for thirty years. The same revolutionary spirit in America resulted in a Constitution, a democratic form of government, and a George Washington as the leader of our nation's destiny."

You may wonder what accounts for the difference. It was because of the Pilgrims and the Puritans of New England. It was because of the Quakers of Pennsylvania, and William Penn who said: "Unless we are governed by God, we will be governed by tyrants." It was because of the Roman Catholics of Maryland. All helped to build America upon a rock, because God was given a place in the minds and the hearts of the people.

Little Josephine Leonard, the grand-daughter of the late Bishop Leonard, once came to New York City on a visit with her father. While here, they visited all the places of interest. The most impressive experience for the little girl was the trip to the statue of Liberty, and the long climb up inside. That night the little girl could not sleep. Her father asked her what the trouble was, and she replied:

"Daddy, I'm thinking of that big lady with the lamp standing out there all alone. She must get awfully tired. Don't you think someone ought to help her hold up that lamp."

It's so very important that we do our part in holding up this lamp of freedom. At times, we may get tired and impatient. At times, it may seem that we're standing there all alone. But the responsibility is ours. We need to hold that lamp high with patience and with great understanding - in New York, in Little Rock, Arkansas - in Washington, in London, in Paris, in Moscow. That lamp stands for so much. And its light is needed in all corners of the earth!

Now I know that some of you may be saying once again, why he's hardly mentioned God. He hasn't referred to Jesus, to the church. He hasn't said a thing about salvation. And you may be wondering how all this comes together. Personally I feel that freedom and religion are part of the same life. It's my conviction that freedom and religion are essential to each other. Without religion, freedom will soon disappear. Without freedom, religion suffers. Today we need men and women of strong, active faith - faith in God, faith in Jesus and his way of life, faith in freedom, and faith in people. I don't think we can expect to hold on to this great heritage of freedom given to us from past generation unless we continue to live in the same spirit. And so on this Thanksgiving Sunday, when the condition of our country was never more prosperous, and the condition of the world never more perilous, let us be grateful, but at the same time remember that with privilege

there comes great responsibility, and that to whom much is given, much is expected!

LET US PRAY:

Our Father, we are thankful for all that thou hast given us. All that we have been given is thine. May we use it wisely always remembering that to whom much is given, much is expected!