



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

Date: 03 October 2004
Title: **"Flowers, Birds and Whines."**
Comment: Insert Comment here
Author: The Rev. Tyler A. Strand

Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Deuteronomy 8: 1-3,6-10
Second Reading James 1:17-18,21-27
Gospel Matthew 6:35-33

Thanksgiving is really tough for Episcopal clergy to preach on- especially here in the Tropics. First of all there's all the mythological stuff we grow up with in the United States: pilgrims, Indians, the Mayflower, turkey. It all goes back to a small group of religious misfits who left England in the 1600's first to Holland and then the American colonies. We are taught to consider these Puritan settlers in Massachusetts as being pioneers of religious freedom when in fact they refused to compromise anything of their very restrictive and bigoted interpretation of Christianity to be part of a new, comprehensive and inclusive Church of England: that is- us! It's hard to make them the heroes of the story when the bishops they hated and vilified were some of the greatest theological and poetic minds of our Church history! Our denomination was more than happy to see the Pilgrims go!

Then there's the date of Thanksgiving. In America, it is celebrated during the last part of November. For many of my years growing up in Chicago, there was more snow on the ground at Thanksgiving than at Christmas, and there was nothing to be seen of harvest fields ripe with corn and pumpkins. We might as well be singing about our summer vacations as trotting out "we plow the fields and scatter the good seed on the land" when Christmas is less than a month away. At least the British, the Australians, the Canadians and others have the right idea: celebrate a harvest

festival at the end of the actual harvest when you can bring samples of God's bounty from the fields, not from the supermarket!

But what do we do here in the Tropics where there is no "harvest season"? We have God's bounty all year long- it is said that you can put a Popsicle stick in the ground and it will grow in a week. We could pick any day of the year for this celebration and get away with it!

But let's face it; the harvest per se is only part of the celebration of Thanksgiving. The more important aspect is the act of being thankful. That should be such a natural thing that we wouldn't need to dedicate an entire day to it. But sadly that's not the case. We live with such abundance that it's sometimes embarrassing, and yet because life might get a little hard at times we don't feel that it is a gift, but something we've earned. It's our due- small enough payback for the long work days, the taxes, the bribes, the traffic, the kids, and anything else that keeps us from the perfect existence that we long for.

That's why it's so important to have an occasion when we stop our whining over unrealistic expectations and just think about how rich we really are. And when I'm using the word "rich" I have to be sensitive to the fact that some in this parish of generally comfortable people are not materially well off at all, and some who you might think are rolling in dough are actually struggling. So I have to be careful here: when I say *rich* I am suggesting the same thing that Jesus did in his sermon that forms part of today's Gospel in which he compares obsessive concern for food and clothing with the apparent simplicity of the natural world. Birds and flowers don't seem to have unrealistic aspirations: they simply live to the glory of God.

The point of our Lord's teaching today is found in the last sentence: "...Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." This is not a "Gospel of Prosperity" of the kind that tells people that they only have to believe in God and they will be rich. It is rather a "Gospel of sufficiency" by which we can recognize the potential we already have for lives that are full, happy and productive. It gives no false hopes for selfish goals. Neither does it get us off the

hook from actively helping the truly poor and disenfranchised. But it does tell us to stop thinking in the way that says, "If I only had this thing or that I would be really happy." That way of thinking is a dead end.

It all starts with that pause I spoke about earlier: a moment to consider what we already have, and to be thankful. Such a simple word, such a simple concept; but with profound implications for our spiritual life- whatever time of the year we decide to think about it.