

The first Thanksgiving was held in the autumn of 1621 in celebration of the colonies' first successful harvest.

Near the end of 1777, General George Washington issued an order calling for a day for "solemn thanksgiving and praise" to God for recent victories in the revolution against Britain.

In 1841, an historian found a letter mentioning the 1621 feast and describes it as the "first thanksgiving."

Over the next 20 years, a letter-writing campaign petitions for the last Thursday of November to be designated a national holiday of thanksgiving.

In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln declares the last Thursday of November as Thanksgiving Day.

From 1939 until 1941, Thanksgiving is set one week earlier by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In 1941, it is returned to its traditional spot – the last Thursday of November.

Yet for all of that history, the first Thanksgiving actually took place not in New England, but in Florida.

56 years before, the Spanish settlers held a religious service followed by a communal meal.

Most likely, that religious service was what we would call the "Eucharist" ... a sharing in the Lord's Supper ... in memory of Christ's surpassing gift of Salvation.

There is a prayer used in our Eucharistic celebrations, which is addressed to God and says:

*For, although you have no need of our praise,
yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift,
since our praises add nothing to your greatness
but profit us for salvation,
through Christ our Lord.*

This is difficult for the 21st century mind to grasp. We tend to like to think that we bring something to the table. Yet God was perfect in essence and substance before any act of Creation ever was put forth.

The solution to this conundrum is to realize that everything is grace.

We like to consider that we make our decisions, and we do what we want. Yet every good thing that comes from us is because of God's gift of grace acting in our lives.

Not that we are robots or automatons. We always have the choice – based in our free will – to accept or reject God's grace in our lives.

Yet the prayer of Solomon that we heard from the Book of Kings, and the opening lines from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians ... both of these offer praise to God.

Often times, we can get too attached to efficiency. We may be tempted to ask: "If God has no need of our praise, then why bother?"

And the question can quickly become one of "chicken and egg." That is, which came first?

If we do the math, we quickly realize that God came first. And His grace came first. So, when we praise God, we are choosing to cooperate with His grace ... *"adding nothing to [His] greatness"* ... but rather returning to God what he has already given us.

If you will indulge me, I'd like to make a bit of a theological analogy.

When a child buys a gift for a parent – most likely any money they have has come from the parent. The parent buys the gift, the parent may even wrap the gift. And on the day that the gift is given, the child gives the gift to the parent.

From an economic perspective – it would seem as if nothing has really transpired.

Yet the pragmatism of the human mind can miss the practicality of the supernatural transaction.

Just as the child's gift to the parent originated with the parent, there is a higher – a more elevated – perhaps even a supernatural thing

happening here. The child is expressing their love for the parent, even though the parent drove to the store, earned and spent their own money, and put more effort into the action than the child did.

And so it is with God.

The beauty here isn't in the transaction, but rather in the cooperation. The exchange of Love which is effected in acts of grace is not a zero-sum-game. But rather comes in the sharing of an unlimited resource of grace, mercy, and love.

While our act of Thanksgiving originates with God and returns to God ... what is changed in this transaction – or rather, what is transformed in this exchange ... is us.

And it's not enough to think it, or to want it, or to dream it.

We have to do it.

God created us as a body and a soul, and because of this, our reception, action, and return of His grace is done both spiritually and physically.

This is what theologians call an “incarnational” response.

The “Incarnation” with a capital “I” is what Scripture speaks of when we hear “And the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us.” Jesus Christ is the capital “I” Incarnation.

Our actual response to God's grace is our living out that incarnation as members of Christ's body.

And so, we do the impractical. Our transactions of praise, grace, and thanksgiving – while appearing impractical, actually transform us to be more and more like Christ ... and “*profit us for salvation.*”

As we continue our sacrifice of praise, let us dig deep and let the Spirit of God fill us with grace, love, and mercy ... so that we might “*let go, and let God*” ... and in the process be transformed by His grace as we continue our prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

May we always abide in Jesus Christ – and may everything that we do be through Him, with Him, and in Him. In Jesus name. Amen.