

DATE: November 23, 1969

SUBJECT: THE SMOG OF TAKING THINGS FOR GRANTED

The Civil War story "Shenandoah", was shown on television a short time ago. I remembered it from having seen it in the theatre but I watched it again because I thought it was such a sensitive story. The struggle of a family and the struggle of a nation. There was one scene in the movie that was amusing. When the patriarch of the clan had sat down to the dinner table, his grown and partially grown sons and daughters were seated at the table beside him. Everyone put on a mask of reverence as they bowed their heads and the father began to pray. "Lord we have this food because we went out into the fields and we worked. We sweated and we worked to make this food grow. We labored hard many days and then finally gathered it and then we cooked and then we brought it to the table. Everything that was done we did, but we thank you just the same." Well there was a slight chuckle from almost everyone who heard that prayer. A reluctance to laugh outright because possibly here was an irreverence. But I think more a fact of identification on the part of the viewer because here he was courageous to say the things that most of us really feel. Why should I be grateful to anybody for anything. Haven't I done it myself. I'm a self-made man and nobody has helped me along the way. I've done it myself, so why should I say thanks, to anybody. We don't often think of gratitude and ingratitude as we think about virtues and sins. This is more indicative of righteous living and sinful living perhaps than any other attribute. For living with a sense of gratitude is an awareness is that we are a part of greater whole. That we are dependent not only upon God for the intangible things that he pours constantly into our lives and environments but upon people. We appreciate one another when we realize how dependent we are upon one another. Perhaps we do pay for the services that are performed. But that doesn't detract from that fact that we are constantly draining upon what others have done and what others are willing to do in order to make our lives richer. Our lives are swelled when we are grateful and they shrink when we live with a sense of ingratitude. And so do nations.

Quite understandably the celebration of Thanksgiving is as much a national celebration as it is a religious celebration. Entertwined in the growth of our nation are the ideals that were established by the pilgrim fathers when they first came to America. Ideals that we tend to overlook and tried upon in our projected day in which we live. So often we take our heritage for granted. Our society is one in which we can easily adapt that is separating ourselves from the past. Refusing to look too far into the future and being concerned only with that that exists for the moment. Perhaps has there never been such near-sightedness exhibited today in men of worthy position that we are experiencing today. Problems ~~that~~ confront us that are unparalleled. Problems overwhelm us that we have never even approached in generations passed and the solutions that so often we offer are so superficial, so temporary that we stand in fear when we consider how we can go. As opposed to the way that we ought to go. The past through which



America has come is a beautiful record. A history that is woven finally of beautiful and magnificent experiences. A finally cut social patterns and political aims and gains. The other evening there was a television special on the work of Norman Rockwell. It was a beautiful program. All of us are familiar with the paintings of Norman Rockwell, particularly as they graced the covers of Saturday Evening Post for so many years. Some how he got beneath the veneer of American life and he exposed us as our true selves and we recognized ourselves immediately. The Chronical of his portraits of America will be an invaluable part of the historic record of this great nation. His type of art isn't prevalent today, nor is it popular. It isn't sophisticated enough, for what most of us are looking for. It deals upon the emotions and most of us are trying to avoid emotional encounter and involvements. But there was one picture that was shown again that I remembered when it appeared on the cover of a magazine. It depicted a little old woman with straggly gray hair, stopped with age, dressed in the signs of poverty. And with her was a little lad who undoubtedly was her grandson, ~~now~~ approaching his teens. The two of them were seated at a table in a modest cafe. The table that seated four persons and across the table from them were seated two truck drivers who were dressed casually as they were dressed to drive their trucks. They are looking at the little woman and the little boy with a look of embarrassment on their faces and almost a look of respect at the same time. For the little woman has her head bowed and her hands clasped and the little boy is sitting in like fashion across from her asking a blessing upon the food they are about to eat and the two truck drivers sit uncomfortably for this ritual of love. That pattern of living is fast becoming obsolete in both families, and in individuals. But to live in a sense of gratitude is to open up the very portals of heaven, to be flooded with Gods ~~gift~~ goodness. And to live without gratitude is to shut God out. We think of gratitude as simply a social grace and we teach our children to say "thank you" when someone has offered them a piece of bubble gum or a stick of candy. Has there any child grown to maturity who hasn't passed through the years when someone gives him a piece of candy and then the mother or father which ever one is present, says now what do you say. And the little boy or little girl will timidly say "thank you". But that isn't gratitude, its learned responses. But gratitude is more than a social grace of expressing appreciate for what someone has done, but gratitude is a designed attribute a swelling of the soul to accomplish the greater experiences of life, that God puts value upon. We could pass this by as simply nice manners.

But Jesus brought us up abruptly when he cryptically recorded for us an experience in which he was involved. On one day he was on his way to Jerusalem when he came upon a little cluster of people sitting beside the road, ten in number. They were at a distance from the highway because they were lepers and the law of the land and their religion forbade them to come into contact with any person and they would make unclean any person they touched. And so they stood at a distance begging alms from people as they passed by. This is one of the most dread diseases recorded that man has ever been obsessed by with the flesh literally dying upon the bones.



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As Jesus approached, they beg alms. He went beyond giving them coins by which they might buy food and clothing. He called them to him and when they stood there, he told them to go to the priest that they might be pronounced clean for he had now cleansed them of their leprocy. One cannot even imagine the joy that must have swelled in their hearts as they realized that for living as dead men for all these months and perhaps years that suddenly they were whole and clean again and so each of the ten rushed off to the nearest priest to be declared clean. Jesus lingered in that community for some time. Perhaps waiting for after awhile one of the lepers came back to the place where Jesus was and as he approached him not only did he walk up to ~~where~~ give him thanks, he threw himself down upon the ground rubbing his face in the dirt and looking up the Jesus offered his deepest thanks for what he had done. Now Jesus passed the second ~~time~~ blessing upon him. He said because you have come back to give me thanks, now you are whole. There was an incomplete healing in the man. The physical healing had been done but the spiritual healing was yet to be, now that had been accomplished and he was whole. And then Jesus said, where are the nine and the man said "I don't know." They remain partially whole because they do not have the gift of remaining grateful. We must take that lesson as Jesus surely meant it to be taken.

For we too are only partially whole when we live in an environment of ourself. Without realizing that we are dependent upon God and man for the things that truly enrich our souls and make us whole beings. Its not a gross sin, our sense of ingratitude. Our ingratitude stems more likely from the erosions of our lives, the simple lacks, the things that we have left out that keep us from being sensitive to our relationship with God and with one another. For there is the lack of awareness.

Many of us do not live in this sense of gratitude, because we are not aware of our dependence. We do not permit ourselves the pleasure of relating ourself to the help and the gift of other people. Yet if we only let our fancy take a flight back through the years and pause for just a moment upon individuals that we have met, how easily we can see that we have had to lean heavily upon other in order to be what we are and to be where we are. We have built a calisniss about our thinking so that we do not become aware of the day by day and minute by minute emcounters with God and man. As we take in abundance without asking or even showing any concern from whence it might come.

Its graphically portrayed to day amoung young people who are turning their back upon affluence without realizing that it out of the labors of parents and the sacrificial giving of parents that they are able to be what they are and to do their thing. And yet they reject all that other have done. Rejecting parents because they feel out of communication with them, when all the while their ability to ~~make~~ think for themselves and take their particular stand grows out of sacrificial love and concern from parents and others. Simply we aren't aware that we are denied the gift of gratitude.



Then we oftentimes lack sensitivity. I received a letter a short time ago in which the writer had enumerated a number of things for which I had done for which he was grateful. I passed over the letter quite embarrassingly until I came to the closing word. Instead of sincerely, there was the word gratefully and then the name was signed. And that word said more to me than any of the things that he had enumerated because it was a spirit that was expressed there, a sensitivity.

Esop's Fables so beautifully captivate ideals and truths. And one of them stands out as we think about gratitude having to do with Androcles and the Lion. In Esop's Fable Androcles is a slave that has escaped his master. Fleeing for his life and safety only to discover that in his way there stands a lion. Turning around abruptly he starts to flee, but he realizes that the lion is not following. Cautiously he turns about, approaches the lion, there he discovers that the lion is in pain favoring one paw above the other and so cautiously he approaches takes the paw in his hand, and sees there a thorn that has been embedded in the foot of the lion. Taking his fingers very deeply he gets hold of the thorn and pulls it out of the lion's paw and relieves him of the pain. The lion responds by taking him in his den and harboring him there in safety from his pursuers. But its only for a short time, the men who are searching for the slave eventually find him and take him back to his owner and the lion is captured and taken into the arena. At a future time he will be taken into the arena to battle with human beings. The slave because he ran away was condemned to die in the arena. Days passed and finally the day came when before thousands of excited spectators the lion would be loosed against a human being and the two would crapple to the very point of death. Androcles was pushed out into the arena. He waited his heart was racing as he saw the bars lifted up and the lion surge out into the arena with a great terrible roar. The lion sprang toward Androcles and then in a moment of recognition, he came up short. Recognizing his old friend that had pulled the thorn from his paw, the lion began to lick the hand of Androcles. The Emperor was moved by what he saw and he asked Androcles what had happened and Androcles told him of his experience with the lion. And out of his compassion for the two he released them both.

Gratitude born of sensitivity between people and between persons of God. If we are to regain a sense of belonging to a greater community, of living together under the blessings of God and producing as a nation and not breaking down as individuals finding faults and fissures within American society which certainly are there. But rather than struggling to break them down further, find them an amity and a unity that hold us together, we must project our minds into the past and regain some of the heritage for which we ought to be grateful, for which we ought to be aware. Nothing does it with greater force and impact than the recalling of that first Thanksgiving Day. When a hand-full of men and women and children struggled out of their native land, fought the forces of the wind and sea, and eventually found refuge on the shores of New England. It was not a land that afforded them everything that

they wanted, but they had fled from a land that had denied them their basic rights and here they were willing to struggle in the face of overwhelming odds and death itself in order to establish the desires of their hearts and souls. That terrible winter fell upon them. When spring came, more than half lay under crude mounds of soil. And to those left alive, only seven were healthy enough to nurse the others. They were at the point of starvation, before the harvest came in they knew what it was to be rationed five grains of corn per meal. And so it became a custom in New England and for many years after that upon celebrating Thanksgiving that upon the place of each person sitting at the table were placed five grains of corn to remind them of the pilgrim fathers. If anyone had an opportunity and a reason to despise the land, surely they did. Because it had robbed them of their dearest possessions. And now threatened to destroy their very lives. And so the ship set sail for England when spring came and the waters were calm enough to set sail, but aboard that ship were only the sailors, not one crewman. They had found liberty and they were willing to die in this new found freedom.

I read in this mornings newspaper that the people of Czechoslovakia are the new depth in moral and achievement. That alcoholism has quadruppled and ~~quadruppled~~ doubled, that the incidence of suicides is is greater than ever before, for they are surrounded by an ideaolgy that drains then of virality, denies them every aspect of freedom. Yet we have hundred and thousands of protesters upon the face of ourlland today who would carry that flag. Who would stamp its ideaology upon the hearts of emerging personalities and who would destroy, break away the very foundation upon which this nation has waxed strong. As individuals, as families, communities, and as a nation, we must pause to be grateful and become sensitive to the greatness born in those who proceeded us here and made it possible for us to be ungrateful.