

U.S. Bounty Granted by God, Pastors Remind Nation on Thanksgiving Day

NEW YORK (AP) — It's an old American treasure. Fundamentally it hasn't changed a bit. Not since that first Thanksgiving Day. But sometimes you forget, and on the special day of giving thanks many will ask: "What have we got to be especially thankful for?"

The question was asked of several ministers about the country, and it is a strange thing, they all gave about the same answer. They said: "Opportunity."

A vague, rhetorical word, you say. That can mean anything or nothing. Besides, you can't eat it or wear it or deposit it in a bank. It's just a fancy word.

Rare Gift

"But if you stop and consider," said Rev. Rodney Shaw of the Oconomowoc, Wis., Methodist Church, "I think you'll see that opportunity is our rarest gift. This is more so now than ever before."

Neither he, nor the other ministers, meant the "Horatio Alger" kind of opportunity — the storied path from want to wealth — but a more profound, vital opportunity — for each American and his country.

It had its roots in the "opportunity" that fired the hearts of the Pilgrims 300 years ago — not renown, luxury or an easy chair — but the hard, raw challenge of work undone and the right to do it.

"Seldom do people think how tremendously unusual such an opportunity was in the world, and is at present," said Rev. Henry C. Koch of Concordia (Evangelical and Reformed) Church, Washington, D. C.

"It is not only the opportunity to do, but to be something of your own making, to grow, free to develop concepts and ideas, to build an individual life."

Well, you say, you've heard that before, that this is a free country. That a man can do, or not do, progress or slide backward, labor or loaf. But it's old stuff, you say, old as the Pilgrims. It's nice. But why the flag waving? Why special Thanksgiving?

"There's a deeply marvelous reason," said Rev. Harry B. Taylor of Cleveland's Presbyterian Church of the Covenant. "It is that our heritage has reflected God's power of growth — and produced even greater, new opportunities today."

Old as Pilgrims

In a way, it's like the Parable of the talents, he said, in that talents, well used, grow.

And so, despite our shortcomings, in so far as Americans have used their opportunities in accordance with God's order, he said, so those opportunities have been blessed and magnified.

"Opportunities do not stand still, but grow or decline," said Msgr. Aloysius C. Dineen of New York's Roman Catholic Church of St. Agnes.

"In a very unique way, our idea of liberty — for self and everyone else — has been magnificently blessed by Almighty God," he said. "And this has brought larger opportunities than before — for each individual and the whole nation."

But wait, you say, just what are these great, new prospects? And you want it said slowly and simple-like. Now first, about this nation. You realize we've become a strong, stable country, unscourged by modern wars. And that's fine. But what are the bright, new national horizons?

Moved Forward

"We have moved forward," said Rabbi Joseph Hager of New York's Wall Street synagogue. "until our opportunities extend to all humanity. The oppressed of the world look to us, and our freedom, for guidance."

By its faith in the dignity of each person, as founded in God's law, the nation has risen to a place of world leadership, the Rev. Mr. Shaw said, with greater opportunities than any generation in the history of the world.

"As never before, with our resources, know-how and passionate convictions of freedom, we are in a position to go into the world to help others shake off the shackles of hunger, disease and chaos."

"For the first time, the world is sufficiently close-knit that there is the chance to establish control of arms of war, thereby ending it, and to bring the world closer to God's laws. That is our opportunity."

All right, you say, that's some thing to appreciate. But what about the individual guy? Everybody is always talking about how we've become a healthy, prosperous people, loaded with TV sets and electric potato mashers. And you can appreciate that, up to a point.

But some people are sick, or poor or troubled. What are the high promises — for us all?

"It is in learning, and we are learning more and more about the orderly cosmos in which we live," said Rev. Mr. Taylor.

Old Ills Righted

Gradually, slowly, old ills are righted, hardships lessened. Medicine finds new keys to nature. Abundance spreads. Economic wrongs are challenged. We hunt truth, God's answers. We do not always succeed. But we try. And succeed some.

"As we discover and learn to cooperate with God's sovereign laws, so His blessings come," he said.

And as in the past, said the Rev. Mr. Koch, our system provides the chance for improvement.

"We may be far from our goals under democracy," he said, "but unlike static European governments, our very Constitution had written into it the intent and enormous possibilities for growth, for the citizen and the nation."

But greater opportunities, the ministers say, also bring greater responsibility. The most precious gifts are most easily shattered, and carry in themselves a perilous power — for good or evil.

'Have Global Job'

"We have a global job now," said Monsignor Dineen. "We must always recognize this is a God-given opportunity, to be used under his guidance."

"The very fact that we've been given great strength," said the Rev. Mr. Shaw, "redoubles our obligation to use it constructively. In developing our new opportunities, we must not lose the spiritual perception that gave them birth."

This, as the ministers see it, is the vision of great opportunity, and cause for gratitude. The Pilgrims had reason for Thanksgiving too, but not so many, nor so immense. They sowed only the seed, and ours is the harvest.

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