



Thanksgiving Day, 1989

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

On Thanksgiving Day, we Americans pause as a Nation to give thanks for the freedom and prosperity with which we have been blessed by our Creator. Like the pilgrims who first settled in this land, we offer praise to God for His goodness and generosity and rededicate ourselves to lives of service and virtue in His sight.

This annual observance of Thanksgiving was a cherished American tradition even before our first President, George Washington, issued the first Presidential Thanksgiving proclamation in 1789. In his First Inaugural Address, President Washington observed that "No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than those of the United States." He noted that the American people—blessed with victory in their fight for Independence and with an abundance of crops in their fields—owed God "some return of pious gratitude." Later, in a confidential note to his close advisor, James Madison, he asked, "should the sense of the Senate be taken on . . . a day of Thanksgiving?" George Washington thus led the way to a Joint Resolution of Congress requesting the President to set aside "a day of public Thanksgiving and Prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal Favors of Almighty God."

Through the eloquent words of President Washington's initial Thanksgiving proclamation—the first under the Constitution—we are reminded of our dependence upon our Heavenly Father and of the debt of gratitude we owe to Him. "It is the Duty of all Nations," wrote Washington, "to acknowledge the Providence of Almighty God, to obey his Will, to be grateful for his Benefits, and humbly to implore His Protection and Favor."

President Washington asked that on Thanksgiving Day the people of the United States:

unite in rendering unto [God] our sincere and humble Thanks for his kind Care and Protection of the People of this Country previous to their becoming a Nation; for . . . the great degree of Tranquility, Union and Plenty which we have since enjoyed; for . . . the civil and religious Liberty with which we are blessed, and . . . for all the great and various Favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us.

Two hundred years later, we continue to offer thanks to the Almighty—not only for the material prosperity that our Nation enjoys, but also for the blessings of peace and freedom. Our Nation has no greater treasures than these.

As we pause to acknowledge the kindnesses God has shown to us—and, indeed, His gift of life itself—we do so in a spirit of humility as well as gratitude. When the United States was still a fledgling democracy, President Washington asked the American people to unite in prayer to the "great Lord and Ruler of Nations," in order to:

beseech him to pardon our national and other Transgressions; to enable us all, whether in public or private Stations, to perform our several and relative Duties properly and punctually; to render our national Government a Blessing to all the People, by constantly being a Government of wise, just and constitutional Laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed; to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations . . . and to bless them with good Government, Peace and Concord.

Today, we, too, pause on Thanksgiving with humble and contrite hearts, mindful of God's mercy and forgiveness and of our continued need for His protection and guidance. On this day, we also remember that one gives praise to God not only through prayers of Thanksgiving, but also through obedience to His commandments and service to others, especially those less fortunate than ourselves.

While some Presidents followed Washington's precedent, and some State Governors did as well, President Lincoln—despite being faced with the dark specter of civil war—renewed the practice of proclaiming a national day of Thanksgiving. This venerable tradition has been sustained by every President since then, in times of strife as well as times of peace and prosperity.

Today, we continue to offer thanks and praise to our Creator, that "Great Author of every public and private good," for the many blessings He has bestowed upon us. In so doing, we recall the timeless words of the 100th Psalm:

Serve the Lord with gladness: come before His presence with singing.

Know ye that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name.

For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE BUSH, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim Thursday, November 23, 1989, as a National Day of Thanksgiving, and I call upon the American people to gather together in homes and places of worship on that day of thanks to affirm by their prayers and their gratitude the many blessings God has bestowed upon us and our Nation.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this seventeenth day of November, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and fourteenth.

