

THANKSGIVING DAYS

Remembering Our Family History

Thanksgiving Days are ones at which the most family members generally come together during the course of the year. Since several generations are present, it is a superb opportunity to have the senior family members tell their own family stories: where did their parents and grandparents come from? When and how? What was life like in those days? Invite them to share some of their favorite family stories.

Through this family sharing process, it will become obvious that all our families are immigrant families—little different from the immigrant families living in our midst today.



Parish-Level Modeling

The Sunday before Thanksgiving is a good opportunity to model the importance of our family histories and stories. This year, 2015, the Sunday is the Feast of Christ the King. The first Scripture from Daniel is a good jumping off point: “...one like a Son of man received dominion, glory, and kingship; all peoples, nations, and languages serve him.”

Our parishes truly reflect “all peoples, nations and languages.”

It is recommended that this Sunday be utilized well to model how individual families might share their own family stories four days later on Thanksgiving Day.

IN SUMMARY

Christ the King Sunday models how individual families might share their own family stories on Thanksgiving Day.

Sunday Mass Sharings



The priests, parish leadership, and staff need to select three different people for each Sunday Mass. It makes no difference what language is used for any particular Mass; there are many parishioners who are available for all Masses. It is recommended that one person be an “old timer” parishioner, someone who has grown with the parish; he/she would have 2-3 minutes to tell their story, especially their earlier years. A second person or couple with children could share their story next. And third, a young person—high school or college—could share his/her family story from their perspective.

It would be most helpful if these presenters could relate their very first jobs when they were growing up. Virtually all will be low-skill, low-paying jobs—like immigrants of today.

The priest presider would introduce this family story sharing in place of the regular homily. He would refer to the Daniel reading and point out that this vision is how the Kingdom of Heaven will look for us: peoples of all nations and languages. The priest would also remind everyone how God is very present in each of our lives from our first days to our final days; walking with us on our life and faith journeys, ever offering hope and encouragement.

Then the three people chosen would give their stories. Preferably, those stories would be written down to keep them focused and within the amount of time available. [Fortunately, if this possible process were made known to parishes soon, there would be weeks to prepare.]

The parish might choose to select a recent immigrant, with papers or without, to be one of those sharing their story. The focus needs to be on the immigrant and the story, not on whether one has papers or not. Let that message be carried subtly.

Since in many parishes, this Sunday is also the one to take up the collection for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, it is simple to point out that so many people helped through the CCHD collection are among our most recent arrivals in the country.

IN SUMMARY

In place of the homily, the priest will select three people per Mass to share their story, focusing on their early years. The message to be conveyed is that God is very present in our lives from the beginning to the end. A mention of the collection for the Catholic Campaign for Human is appropriate.



Following these family stories, the Prayer of the Faithful would be written precisely to capture the vision of families on their life journeys together, those here many years, those recently arrived. A clear petition or two on immigrants who have helped grow, process, and prepare our Thanksgiving dinners should be included. Creativity at the parish would be important.

..... **SUGGESTED PRAYER of the FAITHFUL PETITIONS**

We pray for our family members and friends whose journeys and stories we celebrate during this season of Thanksgiving: let us pray to the Lord

We pray for solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ who have journeyed far from their homes as migrants searching for bread, peace and dignity: let us pray to the Lord

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Many parishes encourage people to bring sacks of food at a Thanksgiving Day Mass—food for the poor. It could be pointed out that many of these recipients will be recently arrived immigrants setting down their roots in our community and parish.

Then, the priest presider would strongly recommend to all gathered at the Masses that on Thanksgiving Day they take time with their families to share their own family stories and journeys. Allow the young people and children to listen carefully to the stories and to learn them. Year after year they will come to know the stories and will be able to pass them on as they grow up.

Invite one or two young people present to video the sharings via their smart phone, iPad, or other device. Make these available on a thumb drive for all the family after Thanksgiving.

The children of the family would be eager to help prepare the Thanksgiving Dinner Blessing Prayer for their own family, including references to those family members who have gone on to God's Kingdom. Constant linkage of the family members and stories is essential. The Prayer should recognize and give thanks for those recently arrived peoples who grow our food, who process it, who prepare it, and who allow us to enjoy God's bounty.

IN SUMMARY

The Prayer of the Faithful would incorporate the vision of families on their life journey together. Remembering immigrants in the prayer and mentioning them in relation to food for the poor would be appropriate.

The priest should also recommend remembering immigrants in the Thanksgiving Dinner blessing prayer and for all to share their family stories over the Thanksgiving meal.

Immigration Message



Thanksgiving family gatherings is not the time to begin heated debates and arguments over immigrants and immigration issues. But it is a splendid time to include the reality and contributions of our immigrants to our communities and society today. If done well and indirectly, this becomes a good foundation to build upon with other efforts in our parishes and with our families.

Our other initiatives, such as National Migration Week January 6 to 12, is a splendid way to continue to build upon the Thanksgiving story-sharing experience.

IN SUMMARY Thanksgiving family gatherings are not to be about heated debates on immigration, but about sharing family stories and the contributions immigrants have made in the journeys of our families.

