

Pilgrims to the New World

Thanksgiving Day. Thursday, November 27, 2024.

Ave Maria Catholic Church. Fr. David M Vidal

Thanksgiving is a beautiful national holiday! It is a celebration that does not exist in other countries but should exist. As a Christian nation, we pause to give thanks to God, first of all, for his blessings upon us. We remember that we are “a nation under God,” under God’s fatherly care and protection! And for this, we are grateful!

To reflect on this holiday, I want to use the image of the *Mayflower Pilgrims* coming to the New World in their search for religious freedom!

A pilgrim is a person who journeys to a certain place for religious reasons. In some ways, we are also the *Mayflower Pilgrims*! We may not have the same boat, clothing, medicine, or other circumstances of their journey, but we are, without a doubt, pilgrims!

God placed us in this world to begin our search for our definitive home. This is our pilgrimage! This is our journey! Let us think about the different dimensions of our pilgrimage.

First, there is an eschatological dimension.

We are people on the way (*viatores*), looking not just for a “new world” but looking for our eternal city. As pilgrims, we are very aware, as it is written in the letter to the Hebrews, that “*there is no eternal city for us in this life*” (Hb 14: 14). Our promised land is not in this world. Our hearts know it. The things of this world are changeable and pass away quickly, and our hearts look for eternity! We search for eternal happiness, goodness, and complete fulfillment. This is the eschatological dimension of our pilgrimage: our promised land is heaven.

Second, there is a penitential dimension.

An earthly journey without troubles is an illusion. Obstacles, challenges, and suffering are all part of a journey. Any sane person knows that to venture on a journey, he must prepare his heart to face adversity. And here we are! With our wounded nature because of original sin, with our own personal burden of sin, we experience sweat and tears as we travel. Hopefully, our sweat and tears become true sacrifices offered to God in reparation. That will be a blessing! Our sacrifices offered to God will become part of our journey of conversion.

Third, there is a dimension of communion.

We do not travel alone! We are not lone sojourners. We are part of a community. We are part of a family. We travel together. That is part of our spiritual journey. No one is saved alone. When we learn that our personal judgment will be based on our merciful works, and when we hear Jesus saying, “*Whatever you did for one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did for me*” (Matthew 25:40), we understand that we are not saved alone. This is the pilgrimage of the Church, the pilgrim Church. We are part of her! With good examples, truthful words, compassionate acts, fraternal corrections, and faithful friendship, we help each other safely arrive home.

Fourth, there is a festive dimension.

Our journey has a penitential aspect, but there are also moments of festivity. Festive celebrations, such as a family meal to celebrate God’s graces, are important moments in our pilgrimage. These moments are like fresh air and heavenly bliss! If those moments were not present, our journey would be unbearable. Festivities remind us of our true destiny. Those little joys and celebrations remind us we were created to enjoy eternal happiness. We must break the monotony of our worldly life. We must go out of our daily routine and celebrate God’s work in us.

Finally, there is a worship dimension.

Our pilgrimage is essentially an act of worship. Ultimately, we must desire to encounter God, be in His presence, offer Him adoration in worship, and open our hearts to Him. Without this dimension, our lives are on a ship without a harbor, tossed by the waves, buffeted by the winds, and without hope of rest.

God is our safe harbor; in Him, we find rest! For this reason, prayer is an essential part of our pilgrimage. We raise our hearts in supplication, ask help for the afflicted, give thanks for the received grace and mercy, implore forgiveness for the sins committed, and adore the true God who made us His pilgrims.

Though our names are not engraved on that first *Mayflower* excursion, we, too, are pilgrims, and for that reason, we are grateful!