



A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop Michael Jackels

17 November 2017, 11:26 AM

Celebrating Thanksgiving as a follower of Jesus

A lot of people celebrate Thanksgiving by gathering with family, eating lots of food, shopping till they drop, and watching football.

But what about those people for whom Thanksgiving only serves to remind them that they are alone, hungry, poor, and... Husker football fans?

That's where the followers of Jesus come in.

In his preaching, Jesus describes his followers as those who give up their money, hate their family members, and are ready to suffer and die (I'm not making that up – read *Luke 14:25-33*).

This is I think a case where the words of Jesus can't be taken literally; otherwise, who would want to be his follower? Not me.

Besides, Jesus himself wasn't poor. He attended banquets. He had a house. He had money to use, though it wasn't *his* money; rather, he shared the use of it with others, each contributing to and taking from a common fund.

And can you imagine Jesus hating his mother, Mary? Hating your family was a way to teach that Christian love is not exclusive, like, only love for my family or my kind; rather, Christian love is inclusive of everyone, especially anyone in need.

And yes, Jesus suffered and died on a cross. But what was really going on is Jesus doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. So, when Jesus tells his followers to take up your cross, he is saying we must help people who are in need.

We can therefore understand the words of Jesus to mean that his followers are people who share with anyone in need, just as he himself did.

We learn from the Master that sharing with anyone in need is an important practice of our Catholic religion, as important as worshipping God at Holy Mass on Sunday.

Indeed, sharing with anyone in need is THE sign that we are true followers of Jesus; it is the first law, the greatest law, the fulfillment of all law, this law of love, sharing with anyone in need.

So, in keeping with this teaching, at Thanksgiving time, if someone needs company, we visit, call, or write. If food, then in true Dubuque fashion we offer a turkey and dressing sandwich. And if too

poor to shop, we give or lend money, or shop for them. And if they are Husker football fans... forget it; they're hopeless.

By all means, celebrate Thanksgiving by gathering with family, eating lots of food, shopping, and watching football. But do it all mindful of people who are alone, hungry, poor, and Husker football fans.

And do it all in a spirit of thanks, a word associated with grace, which refers to a gift freely given, not owed or earned. And so, as followers of Jesus, we share with anyone in need regardless of who it is, whether the person is deserving, asks nicely, is aware of what it costs me, or is grateful. Not owed or earned. Grace. Gift. Free.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Michael O. Jackels

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