

Ten lepers are cured, one returns and kneels at the feet of Jesus to give thanks. The Samaritan receives additional blessings from our Lord because of his faith. Jesus said to him, “Stand up and go your faith has saved you” (Lk 17:19). A strong faith helps us to see the hand of the Lord in everything and to give thanks in return. “In all circumstances, give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thes 5:18).

400 years ago, a group of weary Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock seeking a new life on American shores. They were lost ... landing 250 miles north of their intended destination. The trip across the Atlantic Ocean had been extremely difficult. They arrived with few provisions left from their long journey. It was November and they could not plant food until the following spring. Rather than complain about their misfortune, they gave thanks to God. “God shows him the way he should choose. He will abide in prosperity” (Ps 25:12b-13a).

A terrible plague had decimated a Native village, and no one was left behind. The loss of life was tragic but there was a silver lining for the Pilgrims. In the abandoned village, they found a home and ample supplies of corn. The ripened blackberries growing wild were ready to enjoy. Fresh water was readily available from a nearby brook. Rather than complain about their misfortune, they gave thanks to God. “I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands, calling on your name. My soul shall be sated as with choice food, with joyous lips my mouth shall praise you!” (Ps 63:5-6).

Winter was harsh. Nearly half lost their lives. Death is always sad, but death has been conquered through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. Saint Paul speaks of the resurrection of the dead. “It is sown corruptible; it is raised incorruptible. It is sown dishonorable; it is raised glorious. It is sown weak; it is raised powerful. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:42-44). Rather than curse the darkness, they gave thanks to God. “The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. In green pastures he makes me lie down; to still waters he leads me; he restores my soul” (Ps 23:1-3).

As strangers in a strange land, the Pilgrims were startled one day to see a Native walking towards them. Samoset barely spoke their language, but he had learned from fishermen far to the north just enough to get by. Samoset returned a few days later with Squanto, a Native who was fluent in English. Sadly, Squanto had been kidnapped as a child and taken to England as a slave. He was set free as an adult and returned home. The Pilgrims gave thanks to God for their newfound friends. “Let the words of my mouth be acceptable, the thoughts of my heart before you, LORD, my rock and my redeemer” (Ps 19:15).

If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime. Squanto shared his knowledge of subsistence with the Pilgrims. He taught them how to fish for eels in the local streams and how to catch alewives by setting up traps. He showed them how fish could be used as fertilizer to help corn grow in abundance. The Pilgrims gave thanks to God: “Blessed the one concerned for the poor; on a day of misfortune, the LORD delivers him” (Ps 41:2).

Miscommunication and misunderstanding often lead to clashes between differing cultures. Squanto was a bridge to help the Pilgrims respect the Native community and to help the Natives understand the Europeans. Squanto negotiated a peace treaty between the two so they would live in harmony. That agreement was famously celebrated in the first Thanksgiving in which both gave thanks to God. “I say to the LORD, you are my Lord, you are my only good. As for the holy ones who are in the land, they are noble, in whom is all my delight” (Ps 16:2-3).

Sources:

- The American Miracle: Divine Providence in the Rise of the Republic by Michael Medved
- bobrussell.org/the-providence-of-god-in-the-pilgrims-survival