



# Thanksgiving as Mystical Communion

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The modern myth is bound up with the “better world,” the notion that through proper management and applications of science and technology (and all of the so-called “sciences”), we can make the world a better place – meaning that we will be able to eliminate the negative and maximize our pleasure. Pleasure is equated with the good, while suffering is seen as inherently bad. Modernity seeks to turn the world into a candy store (without diabetes).

The most bizarre outcomes of modernity’s false philosophy can be seen in today’s campus cults who demand “safe places” – defined as a world without discomfort or contradiction. “You must not say this, think that, wear this, eat that, drink this, and on and on, because these things are bad, because these things create pain (my imagined pain), and you are evil.” It’s a brave new world that is being “bettered,” but I suspect very few will want to live in it.

My continuing critique of modernity has nothing to do with technology, medicine, science, etc. None of those things are “modern” in and of themselves. Modernity is a set of ideas, not a time in history. One of its most subtle bits of propaganda is to pass itself off as a historical period, and, even, as the inevitable outcome of everything that has gone before. To be “unmodern,” is therefore, to be “out-of-date,” “backward,” “Neanderthal,” “positively Medieval,” or some such descriptive. Modernity is propaganda parading as history.

It is also ungrateful.

There is a classic Orthodox prayer set for the morning:

O Lord, grant that I may meet all that this coming day brings to me with spiritual tranquility.  
Grant that I may fully surrender myself to Thy holy Will.

At every hour of this day, direct and support me in all things.  
Whatsoever news may reach me in the course of the day,  
teach me to accept it with a calm soul and the firm conviction  
that all is subject to Thy holy Will.

Direct my thoughts and feelings in all my words and actions.  
In all unexpected occurrences, do not let me forget that all is sent  
down from Thee.

Grant that I may deal straightforwardly and wisely with every  
member of my family, neither embarrassing nor saddening  
anyone.

When I first encountered this prayer, I found it impossible to say  
it. Instead, its un-prayed presence, for me, constituted wrestling  
with God.

Is God at work in all things and are all things being brought to a  
good conclusion? Are the terrible things that happen to me or to  
another devoid of God or, are they, somehow the work of the  
Cross within history? This last question proved to be an open  
door for me. God does not stand outside of history manipulating,  
controlling one thing or another, aloof and judging. The Cross of  
Christ is not a single event of three hours duration, a mere

payment for sin. The Cross is the revelation of a mystery-at-work  
that has been hidden from the ages but has always been true.  
Christ is the “lamb slain from the foundations.”

Christ reveals to us that He not only loves those who suffer, but  
He *becomes* those who suffer (Matt. 25:40).<sup>1</sup> Christ becomes  
what we are, uniting us to Himself, that we might become what  
He is. On the Cross, we see, not only the suffering of God, but  
the suffering of the whole world, *everywhere and through all  
time*. Like Joseph the Patriarch, we are able to say of suffering,  
“You meant it to me for evil, but the Lord meant it to me for  
good.” (Gen. 50:20)

With this in mind, we are able to give thanks always and for  
things, not because we think suffering itself is good, but because  
the One who alone is good has Himself become our suffering. By  
the same token, when we ourselves do good to those who are in  
need, and unite ourselves to them, we also unite ourselves to God  
whose providence cares for all at all times and all places.

Thanksgiving, particularly with this understanding in mind, is a  
continual act of offering and sacrifice, the very heart of a  
Eucharistic life. “Thine own, of Thine own, we offer unto Thee,  
on behalf of all and for all.”

No doubt, Christians will continue in doing good. However, in  
spite of every modern mythology, the world will not be a “better”  
place. Evil things will continue to happen (many of them done in  
the name of a better world). Modernity, however, cannot bear  
suffering, which is truly tragic in that suffering is an inevitable  
part of every life. The modern world’s absence of a meaningful  
narrative with regard to suffering – other than to eradicate it –  
perpetuates and cultivates a heart that is frequently unable to be  
grateful. Of course, if sufficient steps are taken to shield someone  
from the reality of suffering, a make-believe “better” world can  
be maintained for a space of time. This, in large part, is the origin  
of the cult of prosperity (in its many guises).

The Christian heart, on the other hand, is manifest most  
prominently in the giving of thanks. The central act of worship is  
itself the giving of thanks (*Eucharist* is from the Greek for  
“giving thanks”). In the very first paragraph of St. John  
Chrysostom’s anaphora, we hear:

For all these things we give thanks to You, and to Your only-  
begotten Son, and to Your Holy Spirit; for all things of which we  
know and of which we know not whether manifest or unseen,

The central act of Christian worship gives thanks *for all things*,  
to which the people say, “Amen.”

The mystery of our salvation is found within the Cross of Christ,  
His suffering, death and resurrection. The fullness of that  
salvation reveals itself to us as we come to know that all things,  
known and unknown, those we see as good and those we see as  
bad, have been gathered together by God into Himself. It is there  
in that union (and there alone) that “all things work together for  
good.” And there we give thanks.