

## **Upon Reflection . . . A Message from Fr. Gordon Thanksgiving 2019**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

Part of the pleasure in learning to read when I was young was the ability to identify the titles of books that my mother kept in several low mahogany bookcases in one corner of our front room. I had always been fascinated by the different colored dust jackets and the curious lettering that I'd been too young to decipher. As I would later discover, mom was quite eclectic in her literary choices. There were histories and biographies, novels and books of verse, guidebooks to foreign countries, works on natural science and astronomy, nearly every major discipline was covered! I'm grateful that today I still have many of her books as part of my own collection.

I do recall one title, however, that stood out to me when I was old enough to read it. It was ascribed to a collection of short stories by the Midwestern writer Bess Streeter Aldrich called *Journey into Christmas*. I don't recall ever actually reading the title story or the other stories in the collection until much later. At the time I think I was simply intrigued, and strangely moved, by the words 'journey into Christmas.' They seemed to evoke a sense of passage, of transition from one time to another, one season to another. I remember feeling expectant and especially joyful when I considered those words, as though I was anticipating something that had not yet arrived but that I was being urged to wait patiently for, to prepare myself to welcome when it came. I was fascinated as well by the notion that this was a journey not toward Christmas but into it, and that I should be eager to taste its richness, to plumb its depths.

That journey began for me each year with Thanksgiving. As the autumn air became colder, as lonely trees waved their bare branches to a steel-gray sky, and as hearts and bodies turned their attention homeward (to crackling fires and fragrant kitchens maybe?), my mind and imagination took a different turn. I wanted instead to travel, to take in all the sights and sounds and smells around me, and to visit all the hopes and yearnings that mark this changing, journeying season. Most of all, I wanted to feel thankful, to be truly grateful for the gifts I had been given and had so often taken for granted, most importantly the gift of life.

Later, when I was introduced to traditional English hymnody, I would find words and music matching my desire to praise and give thanks, time-honored songs that spoke both of my dependence on God and my joy in knowing the love with which God welcomes our trust and faithfulness. Many of them still ring in me with all the power and grace of that first hearing: 'Come, ye thankful people, come' . . . 'O God, beneath thy

guiding hand' . . . 'We gather together to sing the Lord's praises' . . . 'For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies, / for the love which from our birth over and around us lies' . . . and so many more.

But perhaps the most revealing and inspiring thing that I encountered on my journey into Christmas was the extent to which this journey is a communal one, a shared one, something to be valued and enjoyed together. It's true that at Thanksgiving we acknowledge our personal gratitude for God's bounty, for the many ways God has blessed us and our families over the past year. And yet, at the same time, we join our praises with those from across our country, with fellow citizens of every color and creed and national origin and from every walk of life. While not forgetting the many sins of our nation's past nor overlooking our current inequities and painful divisions, we nonetheless give thanks for those common gifts God has given us principal among these the blessing of liberty and the reach of justice even as we pray for the wisdom and courage to make these gifts the true inheritance of all. With a resolve that is both dream and pledge, we can say with the Psalmist, 'My boundaries enclose a pleasant land; indeed, I have a goodly heritage' (16:6).

So may your own inward and outward journeys be rewarded with that same knowledge and that same resolve, as God gives you the light to see the truth and to live it. And may this season of grateful expectation and returning hope find each of you at peace in mind and heart and soul. May it find all of us a people longing to spread God's love and eager to do God's will. . . Come, ye thankful people, come!

Many Blessings and Happy Thanksgiving!  
Fr. Gordon +