



Thanksgiving Reflection

Joining my sister on a trip to Boston, I took the opportunity to visit Plymouth Hall Museum and to read *Of Mourt's Relations – A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth*. The pilgrims' response to a perilous journey, daily sufferings of cold, hunger and a death rate of fifty percent was inspirational and educational. Of the eighteen couples that left England, only four survived the year intact. The rest were left as widowers and orphans. And yet, trials became their sacrifice of love, given for one another and for their God, in whose providential care they trusted.

A Shared Pilgrimage

Wednesday, the sixth of September, the winds coming east north east, a fine small gale, we loosed from Plymouth, having been kindly entertained and courteously used by divers friends there dwelling, and after many difficulties in boisterous storms, at length, by God's providence, upon the ninth of November following, by break of the day we espied land which was deemed to be Cape Cod, and so afterward it proved. And the appearance of it much comforted us, especially seeing so goodly a land, and wooded to the brink of the sea. It caused us to rejoice together, and praise God that had given us once again to see land.¹

A Shared Grief

And in three months past, die Half our Company. The greatest part in the depth of winter, wanting houses and other comforts; being infected with the scurvy and other diseases which their long voyage and unaccommodated condition bring upon them. So as there die sometimes two or three a day. Of one hundred persons, scarce 50 remain. The living scarce able to bury the dead; the well not sufficient to tend the sick: there being in their time of greatest distress but six or seven who spare no pains to help them. Two of the seven were Master Brewster, their reverend Elder, and Master Standish the Captain.²

A Shared Thanksgiving

You shall understand, that in this little time, that a few of us have been here, we have built seven dwelling-houses, and four for the use of the plantation, and have made preparation for divers others. We set the last spring some twenty acres of Indian corn, and sowed some six acres of barley and peas, and according to the manner of the Indians, we manured our ground with herrings or rather shads, which we have in great abundance, and take with great ease at our doors. Our corn did prove well, and God be praised, we had a good increase of Indian corn, and our barley indifferent good, but our peas not worth the gathering, for we feared they were too late sown, they came up very well, and blossomed, but the sun parched them in the blossom.

Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after have a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors; they four in one day killed as much fowl, as with a little help beside, served the company almost a week, at which time amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest King Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain, and others. And although it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of our plenty.³

The story of the pilgrims reminded me of Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemmann's reflection on our gathering at the Lord's table, named by the early church "our offering of thanksgiving" or Eucharist:

And thus this offering to God of bread and wine, of the food that we must eat in order to live, is our offering to Him of ourselves, of our life and the whole world. "To take in our hands the whole world as if it were an apple!" said a Russian poet. It is our Eucharist. It is the movement Adam failed to perform, and that in Christ has become the very life of man: a movement of adoration and praise in which all joy and suffering, all beauty and frustration, all hunger and satisfaction are referred to their ultimate End and become finally *meaningful*. Yes to be sure, it is a *sacrifice*: but sacrifice is the most natural act of man, the very essence of his life. Man is a sacrificial being, because he finds his life in love, and love is sacrificial: it puts the value, the very meaning of life in the other and gives life to the other, and in this giving, in this sacrifice, finds the meaning and joy of life.⁴

All that we encounter, abundance and scarcity, joy and suffering, the beautiful and the ghastly, become *meaningful* in our sacrifice to God; it all becomes our offering.

¹ *Mourt's Relations – A Journal of the Pilgrims of Plymouth*. 1622. Bedford Mass: Applewood Books, 1963. 15.

² Bradford, William. *Of Plymouth Plantation* New York: Alfred A. Knopf 2016. 77.

³ *Mourt's Relations – A Journal of the Pilgrims of Plymouth*. 1622. Bedford Mass: Applewood Books, 1963. 81-82.

⁴ Schmemmann, Alexander. *For the Life of the World*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998. 35.

Art: Robert McGinnis, *Freedom's Gate: Plimoth Plantation 1627*