

Dear Friends,

Everyone seems to like Autumn. The cooler sweater weather after a hot summer, colorful leaves and mums that adorn lawns and homes, football games that give us something to cheer about (maybe?) are just some of the things we welcome at this time of year. There are two other things that are important to us as Americans and as Christians: Thanksgiving and Advent.

Our celebration of Thanksgiving goes back to 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln declared a national Thanksgiving Day on the last Thursday of November. In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt moved the date to the second to last Thursday in order to boost the economy by creating a longer holiday season. Some states did not comply, so Congress passed a resolution in 1941 and Roosevelt offered another proclamation making the fourth Thursday in November as the official date for Thanksgiving.

Since that time, families have gathered to offer thanks. It is a ritual carried out across our country and seems to remove any barriers of politics or society.

This year, Advent will fall on the heels of Thanksgiving—on the following Sunday. In the midst of all the activities of fall, we enter a liturgical season of preparation for Christmas. Lest we forget what that means, I suggest that we all take some time to consider the spiritual sense of this season. What can we do to make this Advent different, more meaningful in spite of all the hoopla that the holidays bring?

In today's world, where the media is filled with news of divisions, revenge, and the uncertainty of our future, perhaps we can remember how and why we gave thanks just a few days before Advent. Gratitude has tentacles that are far-reaching. I would like to suggest practicing one of those tentacles as a preparation for Christmas during this Advent: Kindness.

When we feel **grateful** for what we have, we are more likely to be **kind**. A deed of kindness begets another deed of kindness, imitating a "pay it forward" action. **Gratitude** seems to inspire **kindness**. It doesn't take much: a smile, a small gift, a brief conversation, a helping hand, a sympathetic word, a gentle hug. Giving and receiving an act of kindness creates a positive feedback that always benefits both the giver and the receiver. As one author said, it costs nothing, requires no expertise, and has the potential to change the world. . . one person and one act of kindness at a time.

Gratitude and Kindness. These are two acts that are connected in this beautiful season of praise.