

## Thanksgiving Day 2005: “Focusing on Family Values”

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*Jesus said, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Creator feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the fields, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet, I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will God not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?... Indeed your heavenly Creator knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:25-33)*

It has always seemed to me somewhat ironic that this particular text from Matthew’s Gospel with its “consider the lilies of the field” punch line is always the lesson appointed for Thanksgiving Day in my Episcopal tradition. I remember the many years I sat in the pew listening to one preacher or the other waxing eloquent about not being anxious about earthly things. And if I’m honest, what I was thinking was, “Easy for you to say! I’ll bet someone else is at home right now digging through the sideboard desperately looking for matching napkins, watching the clock praying the turkey will thaw out in time and wondering how on earth to arrange the place cards for dinner so Aunt Diane doesn’t end up sitting next to Uncle Billy and we have a repeat of last year’s disaster!”

And now I’m the one in the pulpit -- deeply aware that this day intended to focus our thoughts and prayers on all that we have to be thankful for all too often becomes focused instead on all that we have to get ready for in order to prepare the perfect meal, set the perfect table, gather the perfect family – whatever that’s supposed to be. Which brings to mind a cartoon I remember with a banner hanging across an open doorway announcing, “Annual Convention for Functional Families” – and through the open door was – of course – an empty auditorium.

And there you have it. Another irony for me this Thanksgiving Day is that the unrelenting cultural focus on “family values” that has been dominated by the Religious Right’s obsession about the gender of those who make up a family has included virtually *no* discussion about the actual values that make up a family. That has got to stop. The time is long past for those of us whose faith-based family values focus on the love, support, fidelity and mutuality that are the hallmarks of what a “functional family” strives to be to find our voice – to enter the debate – to rebut the “right.”

My own reconfigured family is an outward and visible sign of the “family values” I’m talking about. We are parents and children; ex-spouses and partners; girlfriends and grandmas. And every time we gather I am amazed at the miracle of how traditional this non-traditional family has become for us -- how blessed we are to have weathered all the changes that have come our

way over the years -- how God has enabled us to stay family through all of it: and I am overwhelmed with gratitude. My family may not make James Dobson's list of ones to focus on -- but it is mine and God is there and we are blessed.

And it is out of that blessing I find the place not of worry and anxiety but of thanksgiving – and today I pray to be given the grace to stay there: even if the napkins don't all match, the turkey is late out of the oven and the relatives don't all get along.

I pray to be given the grace to make this poem of John O'Donohue my own Thanksgiving Prayer:

*I arise today  
In the name of Silence  
Womb of the Word,  
In the name of Stillness  
Home of Belonging,  
In the name of Solitude  
Of the Soul and the Earth  
I arise today  
Blessed by all things  
Wings of breath  
Delight of eyes  
Wonder of whisper  
Intimacy of Touch  
Eternity of Soul  
Urgency of thought,  
Miracle of health,  
Embrace of God.  
May I live this day  
Compassionate of heart,  
Gentle in word,  
Gracious in awareness  
Courageous in thought  
Generous in love.*

*Amen.*