

CONSIDER THIS...

Giving Thanks

by Philip C. Galanis

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I can vividly recall a homily that was delivered by Fr. Bonaventure Dean, Prior of the monastic community of St. Augustine's and Headmaster of the high school which bears its name, during the school's annual Thanksgiving Mass at St. Mary's Hall in 1969, forty years ago. On that occasion, Fr. Bonaventure's homily comprised the following three imperative sentences: "Look around. Think about what you see. Give thanks." Unquestionably, that homily was indelibly ingrained on my consciousness, and in the minds of my schoolmates, as much for its brevity, as for its profundity.

On Thursday, our northern neighbors will observe a day of Thanksgiving to commemorate the day celebrated by the *Mayflower* Pilgrims one year after their 1620 landing at Plymouth Rock. The festival was held to recognize their success in braving many of the adversities and challenges they had to overcome in their first 12 months in the New World.

While we do not officially celebrate Thanksgiving Day in The Bahamas, we do have much for which to give thanks, notwithstanding that at times, we appear to be deluged by the decadent, dolorous and demonic deeds of deviants, by the cacophony of catastrophes and the plethora of pathos and bad news reported by the daily print and broadcast media. Unless we deliberately accentuate the positive things in our society, we could become despondent by what some decry as the dysfunctional institutions that seem to suggest that our society is falling apart. Accordingly, this week I would like us to consider a few of the things we should be thankful for right here in our beloved Bahamaland.

Our nation has withstood and has recovered from the ravages of hurricanes and recessions. Hardly a community in our archipelago has escaped the ruinous effects of these horrific storms that have visited our shores. To be facing the final week of the 2009 Atlantic hurricane season, having been spared from the havoc that often accompanies these climatic aberrations is reason enough to give thanks.

Then there is the worldwide recession that has plagued most of the nations on the planet. While it has taken its tortuous toll on many in our country, this year-long economic tsunami has not been as disastrously devastating for us as it has been for so many others and for this too, we should be thankful.

We are also blessed for having escaped civil strife, pestilence, and famine. When we consider the experiences of many of the nearly two hundred countries, territories and principalities with a total population of six billion, who have not been spared these adversities, we can certainly rejoice in our comparative good fortune. Although touched by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, our little Bahamas has established a global model for saving the lives of those most vulnerable, the children of HIV/AIDS mothers. When other pandemics were sweeping the world, we remained vigilant and, as a result, suffered very little if at all from any of these illnesses like SARS and Bird Flu. With the same kind of vigilance, we will hopefully manage to escape the worst of the H1/N1 flu that is now rearing its ugly head as we approach the flu season. Clearly, we have much for which to be thankful.

We live in a relatively peaceful environment, characterized by the essential freedoms of a civil society -- freedom of speech, freedom of movement, religious freedom, the freedom to peacefully elect our leaders, and practice democratic principles that have guided our country, along with the rule of law. Notwithstanding the ferocity with which we profess our partisan

beliefs, this, too, is a shining example of the health of our democracy that allows us to disagree vehemently as we participate in the political process. This fearless expression of our individual beliefs – whether in politics, religion or Junkanoo – is a mark of a healthy and vibrant society. For this, we should give thanks.

When we view the quality of our lives, we need to look at the institutions that we have established that positively enhance our life experiences and which in many ways have contributed to a rich life with an expectancy that very often exceeds the allotted threescore and ten. For example, on our little islands, we have strong spiritual traditions manifested by our vibrant church communities of all denominations that have been the bedrocks of our far-flung settlements, providing religious training, moral guidance, education and the spiritual boost that our wonderful Gospel music has given generations of Bahamians.

Then there are our educational institutions, which, although challenged in today's world, are still an important part of what makes our society what it is. Our wonderful and growing tertiary institutions, our College, soon to be University, our Law School and our Vocational Training Institution all provide pathways to success for our people, encompassing all of their diverse talents.

Any discussion of the institutions that make us a unique and very fortunate people must include our dynamic tourism and business sector, our growing cultural community – including the all-encompassing Junkanoo – and our developing marine and agricultural industries. These are all institutions that provide us not with only the hope for tomorrow, but a tomorrow that will fulfill the dreams of generations to come. For all of these, we should be thankful.

On a personal note, I am eternally grateful to my parents who instilled in me the imperative to be a responsible citizen, for the Catholic community, its teachings and teachers who have educated me from grade school to university and who have inculcated in me the ethos that we are all brothers. They have also taught me of my responsibility to be my brothers' keeper and to give back to the society that gave me so very much. I will be forever thankful for my family and friends, without whose support and encouragement I would be nothing.

I submit that although we are still plagued by many growing pains that accompany a nation that is but thirty-six years old, in our most fundamental being, we are still a people of goodwill, compassion and consideration for each other. We are still a happy, friendly, warm and peaceful lot. This is another reason for giving thanks.

So now, four decades after hearing his wise words, as I reflect upon the admonitions of Fr. Bonaventure Dean, to "look around", and "think about what we see", even without formally observing Thanksgiving Day, I believe that most of us will agree that there is so very much for which we could and should give thanks.

Happy Thanksgiving.

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