# Jubilate! Thanksgiving Service – A Narrative

By Marc Sammartano

November 21, 2014

**The Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving**
(Edgar Albert Guest, 1881-1959)

It may be I am getting old and like too much to dwell
Upon the days of bygone years, the days I loved so well;
But thinking of them now I wish somehow that I could know
A simple old Thanksgiving Day, like those of long ago,
When all the family gathered round a table richly spread,
With little Jamie at the foot and grandpa at the head,
The youngest of us all to greet the oldest with a smile,
With mother running in and out and laughing all the while.

It may be I'm old-fashioned, but it seems to me to-day
We're too much bent on having fun to take the time to pray;
Each little family grows up with fashions of its own;
It lives within a world itself and wants to be alone.
It has its special pleasures, its circle, too, of friends;
There are no get-together days; each one his journey wends,
Pursuing what he likes the best in his particular way,
Letting the others do the same upon Thanksgiving Day.

I like the olden way the best, when relatives were glad
To meet the way they used to do when I was but a lad;
The old home was a rendezvous for all our kith and kin,
And whether living far or near they all came trooping in
With shouts of "Hello, daddy!" as they fairly stormed the place
And made a rush for mother, who would stop to wipe her face
Upon her gingham apron before she kissed them all,
Hugging them proudly to her breast, the grownups and the small.

Then laughter rang throughout the home, and, Oh, the jokes they told;
From Boston, Frank brought new ones, but father sprang the old;
All afternoon we chatted, telling what we hoped to do,
The struggles we were making and the hardships we'd gone through;
We gathered round the fireside. How fast the hours would fly--
It seemed before we'd settled down 'twas time to say good-bye.
Those were the glad Thanksgivings, the old-time families knew
When relatives could still be friends and every heart was true.

It must be Thanksgiving: the department stores are playing Christmas music! And you know, that's okay. I'll have more to say about that a little later. Tonight we are here to celebrate Thanksgiving with you, and to give the day its full due.

For many Americans – myself included – Thanksgiving – and Christmas, too – center on the family. “We Gather Together”, the hymn says, and so did the poem I read you a few minutes ago.

That poem was written by Edward A. Guest, fondly remembered as “The People's Poet”. His Thanksgiving classic recalls “the good old days”, when families really knew how to celebrate Thanksgiving together. Not like we do it now, with people all wrapped up in doing their own thing, right? Kids these days! … That poem was published almost a hundred years ago, in 1917.

Fifty years later, on Thanksgiving, 1967, I was a kid in the living room, watching football on TV with my father, my brothers, my brothers-in-law, their sons, maybe an uncle or two – yup, the menfolk. The women were, where else? in the kitchen, preparing the magnificent feast that is the centerpiece of the traditional American Thanksgiving. But that's not all they were doing.

Ronda Lee

Attorney-turned-writer, entrepreneur, mentor

(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ronda-lee/the-importance-of-holiday-traiditions\_b\_6111554.html)

in her essay The Importance of Holiday Traditions, wrote:

*The holidays are when tradition is passed down, when the past meets the present to inform the future. Tradition is passed down through the communion of food and music. The old reminding the young of where they came from and the young teaching the old today's technology.*

And was it any different out in the living room? Between plays and over commercials, the men were doing their own version of oral tradition. Who's the greatest quarterback. What's under the hood in this year's cars. Swapping stories of that mystical place, “The Hunting Shack”.

Ms. Lee goes on to say:

*In law school, I learned that more important than the rule was understanding the reasoning behind the rule to apply it properly. Likewise, for our children and heirs, it is important that they understand the reason behind our traditions and the sacrifices others made for their current enjoyment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.*

Okay, fast-forward, 45 years. Another Thanksgiving, in a different living room. I was playing with my grandson and his cousins. The house was full of people – I think we had every decade covered from the 1940's on. My son-in-law and his mother dominated the kitchen while the rest of us did what we could to help – I guess a few things had changed since I was a kid. But yes, the feast was magnificent.

When Father Carves the Duck

~By E. V. Wright

We all look on with anxious eyes

When father carves the duck,

And mother almost always sighs

When father carves the duck;

Then all of us prepare to rise,

And hold our bibs before our eyes,

And be prepared for some surprise,

When father carves the duck.

He braces up and grabs a fork

Whene'er he carves a duck,

And won't allow a soul to talk

Until he's carved the duck.

The fork is jabbed into the sides,

Across the breast the knife he slides,

While every careful person hides

From flying chips of duck.

The platter's always sure to slip

When father carves a duck,

And how it makes the dishes skip!

Potatoes fly amuck!

The squash and cabbage leap in space,

We get some gravy in our face,

And father mutters a Hindoo grace

Whene'er he carves a duck.

We then have learned to walk around

The dining room and pluck

From off the window-sills and walls

Our share of father's duck.

While father growls and blows and jaws

And swears the knife was full of flaws,

And mother laughs at him because

He couldn't carve a duck.

The family is the foundation of the traditional American Thanksgiving. The stories are told, the torch is passed from generation to generation. In America, tradition is centered on holidays.

I know that's not the only way to do it. Human beings have been passing the generational torch for as long as there have been human beings – it's part of what makes us human.

And I know that even in America, we don't all get to share the traditional American Thanksgiving. Those of us who can tell stories about playing with grandkids and carving ducks need to pause a moment. To give thanks for those things, and for all we have. To consider those who don't have what we do. The men, women, and, yes, children, in homeless shelters, or on the streets. People in hospitals. Soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq. To consider what we can do to help. It's absolutely wonderful what a homeless shelter can do with a few dollars and a few hours of time, donated by people with loving hearts. There are people in this room supporting shelters and churches, and because of you, some will eat who would have gone hungry this Thanksgiving.

People with loving hearts. Isn't that the foundation of the holidays, the traditions? Isn't that the foundation of Thanksgiving?

Sometimes, this time of year, you hear people complaining. Christmas trees and Christmas music in the stores and on TV? It's not even Thanksgiving yet! The complaints are linked to “the commercialization of Christmas”, and I don't deny that I lament how commercial Christmas has become.

But, just as Edward Guest a hundred years ago mourned the loss of the true Thanksgiving spirit, “Christmas creep” is not a brand-new 21st Century phenomenon. According to that other brand-new 21st Century phenomenon, Wikipedia:

“As the economic impact involving the anticipatory lead-up to Christmas Day grew in America and Europe into the 19th and 20th centuries, the term "Christmas season" began to become synonymous instead with the traditional four-week Christian Advent season.”

Whether by Washington and Lincoln's good planning, the Pilgrims' good providence, or just plain good luck, we have something pretty special here in America. They have a Thanksgiving like ours in Canada, but it's gets cold early up there – their Thanksgiving is in October. Timing is everything, they say, and we got it right. Thanksgiving lands just in time to launch Christmas.

Thanksgiving and Christmas. Two solid pillars of traditional and love. Just think – we have a month, an entire month, dedicated to people with loving hearts.

Accepting that Thanksgiving begins a season of love does not have to diminish Thanksgiving. It is a wonderful day, a wonderful time – a wonderful concept. And on top of all that, it is also a beginning.

Instead, embrace Thanksgiving. Live it fully. Gather your memories, your joys. Give thanks and open your heart. And then, keep it open. Celebrate each day and love each person, today and for the whole season and on into the new year.

