

Did you know . . .

Some Catholic Thanksgiving Facts

Here are a few facts just to give a bit of challenge to what we learned in school about the first American Thanksgiving.

The First Thanksgiving actually was not celebrated by the Protestant pilgrims of Massachusetts in 1621. Thanksgiving celebrations had already taken place in 1565 (Florida) and 1589 (Texas). [Excerpts all from article of similar name by Taylor Marshall, PhD]

- The first American Thanksgiving was actually celebrated on September 8 (feast of the birth of the Blessed Virgin) in 1565 in St. Augustine, Florida. The Native Americans and Spanish settlers held a feast and the Holy Mass was offered. Don Pedro Menendez came ashore amid the sounding of trumpets, artillery salutes and the firing of cannons to claim the land for King Philip II and Spain. The ship chaplain Fr. Francisco Lopez de Mendoza Grajales chanted the Te Deum and presented a crucifix that Menendez ceremoniously kissed. Then the 500 soldiers, 200 sailors and 100 families and artisans, along with the Timucuan Indians celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in gratitude to God.
- The second American Thanksgiving happened on April 30, 1598, when Spanish explorer Don Juan de Oñate requested the friars to say a Mass of Thanksgiving, after which he formally proclaimed “La Toma”, claiming the land north of the Rio Grande for the King of Spain. The men feasted on duck, goose, and fish from the river. The actors among them dressed and presented a play.
- The Puritan pilgrims were violently anti-Catholic. They left England because they thought that the Church of England was *too Catholic*. These Puritans were strict Calvinists. The pilgrims also opposed celebrating Christmas, dancing, musical instruments in church, and even hymns as *papistical*.
- Squanto, the beloved hero of Thanksgiving at Plymouth Rock, was Catholic! Squanto had been enslaved by the English but he was freed by Spanish Franciscans. Squanto thus received baptism and became a Catholic. So it was a baptized Catholic Native American who orchestrated what became known as Thanksgiving.

So while Thanksgiving may celebrate the Calvinist Separatists who fled England, Catholics might remember that the same unjust laws that granted the crown of martyrdom to Thomas More, John Fisher, Edmund Campion, et al. are the same injustices that led the Pilgrims to Plymouth.

And remember that “Thanksgiving” in Greek is Eucharistia. Thus, the Body and Blood of Christ is the true “Thanksgiving Meal”.

Wishing you all a Very Happy and Blessed Thanksgiving!

Judy Pearson

