

That First Thanksgiving Day

As autumn progresses, a certain holiday approaches. The stores fill with decorative images: turkeys, pumpkins, gray-clad hat-crowned Pilgrims, and that ever-present cornucopia. Many look forward to this particular seasonal day of celebration because of the extensive and delicious meal, not to mention the luminous prospect of school break. But it is the history of this holiday that convinces me I would have greatly enjoyed experiencing firsthand the original celebration. If allowed the choice, I would select this historic event as one in which to participate. For I would like to have known the undiluted gratitude of the hardship-worn settlers, to have met historically influential men, and to have learned the culinary details of such a meal (truly a natural desire for one who bakes) of that first Thanksgiving Day.

What must the colonial settlers have felt on that monumental day, a day whose future significance none anticipated? What would I as a teenager have felt, had I been present? Severe hardship surrounded those settlers of Plymouth Colony: a frigid winter, swift-spreading disease, wild animals. Beset by fears of many kinds, the Pilgrims clung to their faith in God with wholly admirable persistence, and although many perished, not all were laid in that frozen Massachusetts ground. Would I have demonstrated that enduring faith? Would I have remained to observe the hope-giving approach of spring, the unexpected and very welcome support from the Native Americans, the gradual connection built between these drastically different men? When the Indians first stepped forward to help, how grateful the settlers must have been, and undoubtedly were! If only I could experience the level of utter thankfulness they unquestionably felt as they raised their first successful harvest, and celebrated it on that first Thanksgiving Day.

I also would like to have met the men who led that daring expedition to the New World. Of course, at that time, no one would suppose them to be historically influential, including myself if I had

lived in that time. Nonetheless, one can deduce from any history book the courage and perseverance these men exhibited as they struggled to found the Plymouth Colony. Without the leadership of men such as Miles Standish and William Bradford, the colony would have surely perished. If I had lived in their time, I would have had their daily example before me, a constant reminder to preserve courage and keep going. As it is, the example they set remains and shines in the books they and/or others have written, but the living sight of their faithful actions would assuredly hold a far greater inspiration, actions which led to that first Thanksgiving Day.

At last, I approach what most consider the summit of Thanksgiving: the extensive and succulent meal of celebration. Since the Native Americans had generously shared their farming methods with the settlers, the Pilgrims raised a successful harvest, their first in that New World. After all their trials, they finally had the resources to celebrate as they probably never imagined they could. In these times, the hurried preparations for that large dinner must be reminiscent of the excitement with which the Pilgrim women worked. I would have willingly toiled among them, and would have loved to experience the preparation of that meal, devising new dishes, creating new ways to prepare the rich bounty with which to celebrate that first Thanksgiving day.

Truly, I shall never experience that original Day firsthand. However, I and others can experience it through reading of it and remembering it. The events of history cannot be retraced physically, but one can recount them in imagination by reading of them and meditating on them. Although I cannot experience that first event, I may still apply the lessons taught by that early band of settlers. Courageously persistent, they clung to God as they struggled to survive in the perilous New World. All should strive to imitate their bravery, their endurance, and most importantly, their unshakable faith, the fruits of which the Pilgrims celebrated on that first Thanksgiving Day.