

**Living Thanks**  
**By**  
**Daniel E. White November 20, 2023**

Cicero wrote, “Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.” He wrote that before the Second Triumvirate of Octavian, Marc Antony, and Lepidus had him executed as an enemy of the state he loved.

“I am grateful for what I am and have,” wrote Henry David Thoreau. “My thanksgiving is perpetual.” Thoreau must have written this on one of his good days because he could be quite the curmudgeon.

I have been thinking about living thanks; what would that entail? Per usual, I sought out the thoughts of famous people from the past. I like Cicero’s assertion about the value of gratitude but am still grappling with the notion that it is the parent of all other virtues. As for Thoreau, I’m cutting him some slack. There must have been times when giving thanks was not his top priority. But perhaps he meant to imply that the arc of his life and the way he thought about it “bent” toward unceasing thanks.

Here we are, about ready to celebrate another Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of November. The myth of the first Thanksgiving in America depicts it as a multi-racial affair, supplied with bounteous food consumed after the hosts had thanked God for their survival. Since there had been no guarantees of survival, the folks at Plymouth really had an existential reason for their gratitude.

For us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the patterns of celebration are myriad. In general, food is central. For many, a family gathering happens with all attendant drama. Football games are important among the day’s activities for fans, and where to go and what to buy on Black Friday no doubt occupies the thoughts of still others.

One can hope that, even if the gathering around the table is not of people of religious faith, that there are some expressions of gratitude, some giving of thanks. It might be only one day a year when there is the potential for so many people to be in an attitude of gratitude. But at least there is the one day.

Living gratitude is more in the mode of Thoreau’s description of perpetual thanksgiving. I doubt that he meant that he was always saying thanks or that his days were free of experience where gratitude was not what he felt.

In some measure, what we do and say is reflective of the values we have learned from parents, faith leaders, and others who have influenced our lives. Isn’t doing so a profound way of saying thank you to those from whom we learned values like kindness,

compassion, caring, generosity of spirit, and empathy, the ones that transcend politics, economic circumstances, religious belief and other aspects of life that can divide people?

A good friend sent me the eulogy delivered at the celebration of the life of the man who coached the college baseball team on which my friend and the speaker played.

“He was a hard man with high standards, and much of the difficulty [I had was a result of] my emotional immaturity and unwillingness to accept the bit, trust the process, and give my best effort.” The eulogist, now a judge, quit the team but, when the season ended, came to the coach asking for a second chance. The coach gave him that chance.

“As the years went by, and with maddening, ever-increasing frequency, I found myself parroting Coach—first with the soldiers under my command, then with my daughters who would become Division 1 athletes, and finally, with the lawyers and defendants who regularly appear in front of me. Somehow, and despite my misgivings, I had learned, incorporated, and was now espousing the very life lessons I had resented and resisted. He was way ahead of me.”

“Some people go through life and never make a difference. Not Coach; he made an indelible impression on those he met, taught and coached. In this ballpark today, I see the first generation of his legacy in your graying hair and lined faces. But there are generations to follow, because we all took a little of him with us on our life’s journey.”

“I know that with age comes reflection, and with reflection sentiment, and with sentiment comes exaggeration. Ann [the judge’s wife] tells me that the older I get, the better I was. But it is no exaggeration for me to stand here and say that my life is better because Coach Fetz gave me a chance, and when I blew that, he gave me another.”

It is possible that, at some point in his life, the judge wrote or called Coach to say thank you. It is equally possible that he did not. What is evident is that the judge conducted his life as a decades- long thank you.

If ours are lives of living thanks then, perhaps, Cicero makes more sense. Maybe gratitude, in the form of a life well and virtuously lived is the parent of other virtues.

Something to ponder on the fourth Thursday of November 2023 as you take your helping of the dish no Thanksgiving meal should ever be without.

Click here to email your comments to Dan: [danwhitehi@gmail.com](mailto:danwhitehi@gmail.com)