

HOW TO CELEBRATE THANKSGIVING

From The Kids at Boys Town

Father Val Peter

1. The Beauty of Fall is a Silent Teacher

The fall season gives us all here at Father Flanagan's Village an opportunity to reflect on the beauty that surrounds our lives. Beauty, however, has not surrounded our children because life has too often failed them, not at the end, not in the middle, but at the very beginning.

And so, too, many cannot see the beauty of the fall this year because their eyes are dimmed with tears and their hearts are filled with darkness and sadness.

This season is especially beautiful. The autumn leaves are especially glorious. We at Boys Town go to great lengths to help our kids open their eyes and their hearts to this beautiful splendor. Yes, beauty is a silent teacher. And we want the hushed silent beauty of this fall season to teach our children, especially the sad ones, lessons only beauty can impart.

And the first lesson is that beauty surrounds their lives and they need to open their hearts to see it, feel it and embrace it. Many of our kids have lived in darkness most of their lives. And they have not recently seen the beauty of fall because twilight came too quickly for them. And so they are missing something splendid, something luminous, something joyous.

This essay is also written for our dear readers to open your eyes to this beautiful splendor. Perhaps sadness has come into your life through the loss of a loved one, the tragedy of sickness, the onset of troubles for you or your children. Perhaps you, too, have lived in the twilight and not seen the glorious splendor of a fall morning for a long time. Open your eyes. Open your hearts.

Once you master the first lesson of fall (letting beauty touch your heart) then the second lesson follows, namely, awe and gratitude. The beauty surrounds you on every side. It is awesome. It almost takes your breath away. And gratitude spontaneously can spring from your heart, if you let it, the way it did when you were a little child and your mother showed you the beauty of frost on an autumn garden and pumpkins glistening in the morning sun with the geese eating by the cornfield amidst the ground fog.

We adults at Boys Town start off by embracing the wonder and awe that we are thankful for in this beautiful season. You, too, dear reader, please take time to behold the splendor. Let it seep into your soul that the ever old, ever new gratitude you had as a child be brought to the surface and fill your life again with joy.

Share this beauty with your own children. Make a special time. Announce it in advance where each of you, as a family, can point to the loveliness of God's creation and be thankful for it.

Our little children easily embrace these ideas. It takes a little more time for adolescents. They are blasé, but blasé only on the surface. Deep down beauty can touch them all.

Try to make sure on Thanksgiving Day that you insist each one go around the table and say what they are thankful for. The rules are simple...everyone has to say something they are thankful for...they cannot repeat what someone else has said...and it has to come from the heart. Please smile today as you read this essay and let the autumn sun shine into your heart, into your home and into your life.

2. The Beauty of Fall

Yes, beauty is a silent teacher. This fall go to autumn's school. Here is what some of our little boys and girls in Wegner School wrote. They would like to share their thoughts with you.

- Before I came to Boys Town, I never noticed the fall. I never noticed anything but my pain and my family's troubles. Father Peter says when you are hurting; it is hard to see God's beauty in creation. I think he is right. At Boys Town you have a chance to change. Here they help me put my pain aside and help me see the beauty of the fall. It first makes me happy and then it gives me courage to go a long way far from my pain. I am beginning to like the fall.
--Johnny
- When I look at all the beautiful colors of the trees and the way the sun shines on them, it makes me forget for a moment the meanness and the ugliness I have experienced and it makes me thank God for letting me live in a more beautiful world.
--Kiley

- The autumn air seems so much more clean and fresh to me. It helps me to open my heart to nature all around me. It opens my heart to myself. Fall helps me be open minded when I am trying to reach my goals and not letting anyone stop me or get in my way, like the geese flying south in the fall. They don't let anything stop them from getting to a better place. By reaching my goals, I am like the birds taking myself to a better place. -- Martha
- I came here during the summer. It was my summer of sadness. It is now fall and I can see for the first time how beautiful the trees and leaves are. I now like to pick up the leaves and compare the shapes and colors. I like to take the most beautiful leaves and press them in a book. It is what I call the book of beauty. --Jenny
- Fall is so beautiful because of all the colorful leaves. After a rain, I can even smell the wetness of the leaves. When they are dry, I can hear the sound of the leaves go crunch, crunch. I can feel the fun of jumping in a big pile of leaves. --Juan
- Fall is a marvelous season. I get to go outside at night and play in the back yard. That's the best place. You see God's creatures, the turkeys and deer and the doves in the Boys Town wild life refuge. Father Peter claims that a family of skunks talks to him down in the refuge. I don't know if they do or not, but it sure makes me feel good to think that maybe they do. All the fall leaves are beautiful. All God's animals are beautiful. The fall is a beautiful time for God's creatures to play in the leaves of yellow and orange. I hope you enjoy the fall as I do. --Nick
- This is the first time I ever opened my eyes to enjoy the fall season. I see the changes in the color of leaves. When I look outside, the leaves are a shower of beauty coming down from the trees. When walking to school I can hear them crunching under my feet. I can see the lake from my bedroom window with all the bright yellow cotton woods. In the fall the weather changes. I can see my breath some mornings. It is telling me that winter is coming. When the weather changes, the sports change too. I play volleyball in the fall. It is really fun. --Sara
- Fall is the most beautiful season in the whole world. I like raking leaves with my friends, building big piles of leaves and jumping in them. I like fall because Halloween comes and our football season is here. And I wake up in the morning and feel better because fall is here. --Sean

3. How to Cook a Turkey

Every boy and girl in America knows that Thanksgiving dinner is the center of our attention at this season. It is a time for happiness, for sharing and focusing on our blessings. What would Thanksgiving be without a juicy steaming turkey and all the trimmings? Our students in little Wegner School were asked to share with you and me how to cook a turkey and dressing and mashed potatoes and all the trimmings. These are inspiring recipes.

- This is my famous recipe and it's easy to cook. You sit down and first put a dash of prayer in the roaster. Then add one half ounce of patriotism. Mix both of those, prayer and patriotism, together until perfectly blended. Then put a cup full of kindness, a cup of friendship and a pinch of forgiveness in. The last ingredient – love – is a very special ingredient so add as much as need. Stuff the turkey and cook it until golden brown. I hope you like it. It's been nice cooking with you. --Claudine, age 14
- When you ask me for a recipe for turkey and gravy, it is like asking me what is the most important thing about Thanksgiving dinner. To me the most important thing is showing how you all love and care for each other. The turkey is a wonderful thing to eat and it is your hearts together that make it so special. To me the second most important thing is the food. The reason why I say the food is second because if you don't have people with loving hearts, you can't have a good Thanksgiving. So in order to have a tasty turkey you need warm hearts and caring hands first. This is my Thanksgiving recipe. --Alisia, age 14
- I really don't know how to cook. But I do know how to have the best Thanksgiving meal. The best way is to all pile into the car, drive to the south side of town to my grandmother's and there you will find the best food you have ever eaten. We love Grandma! --Anthony, age 14
- I do know one thing and that is how to eat a Thanksgiving dinner with a good attitude. You see, Thanksgiving is more than eating food and inviting all your friends and family. To me you need to give thanks for all those who have helped you and loved you. Do not be sad about the little you have in life. Life is more precious than that. So I ask you to only stop and give thanks. --Jeffery, age 13
- My mom's recipe for Thanksgiving stuffing is first one cup of love. She gets happy on Thanksgiving. Then two cups of patience because she has two kids to worry about. That's us! Then she gets Stove Top Stuffing, puts it in the turkey

with spices. She always uses apples to sweeten it up and that is because we lived in Hawaii. We don't know which we love better. My mom's stuffing or my mom. We think it's my mom.
--George, age 12

- Thanksgiving is a special time of the year. It is time to meet your family, have a feast and give of oneself. Here is my recipe for a perfect Thanksgiving dinner. First one cup of hugs and kisses. Then two cups of tears of joy. Three cups of kindness. And lastly, one very large turkey with dressing and mashed potatoes.
--Jessica, age 13
- Thanksgiving is a time of year when family and friends come together and give thanks for everything you have both great and small. The first thing you have to do is clean the turkey roaster. Make sure all sadness is removed, all anger, all unhappiness. Then you put in the roaster a happy, grateful, loving turkey which will make a good texture and you slowly add in a cup of friendship. You need a tablespoon of peace in the gravy and mix well so there are no lumps. Put the stuffing in the turkey and let it cook until it is well loved. Serve with smiles.
--Joey, age 12

4. Abraham Lincoln's Thanksgiving Day Proclamation - 1863

It is the duty of nations as well as of men to owe their dependence upon the overruling power of God. We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity.

But we have forgotten God. We have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. We have become too proud to pray to the God that made us.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that God should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people.

I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November as a day of Thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens.

5. Blessings in Disguise

So oftentimes at Thanksgiving we are grateful for things that we prayed for and God gave us. But sometimes we forget to be grateful for things we didn't know we needed. But now we know how important they are to us. Our boys and girls are very honest as they share these with you in this Thanksgiving season. We hope you, too, will be grateful for things that have come your way which were blessings in disguise.

- A blessing I received that was a true blessing in disguise. During a sad time, I was told I would not be able to go home for Thanksgiving due to big troubles in my family back home. I did not like it, but I accepted it and I was quiet and kept to myself. I did everything they told me, but I have to admit I had a really good Thanksgiving here. I learned a big lesson on how to accept a blessing in disguise.
--Gregory, age 14
- Hurricane Katrina was for me a blessing in disguise. Because of it, I came to Boys Town. Without it I would have been headed straight to jail. I am grateful to God. When the hurricane came, we went to San Antonio, had to spend five days with no air conditioning in the blazing heat and then we came on a FEMA bus to Boys Town. I am very grateful.
--George, age 13
- My mom divorced my real dad. I didn't like it. Then my mom married my stepdad. I didn't like him, but he was always there for me. When I needed help with my homework or when my real dad would not pick me up on weekends, my stepdad was always willing to help. He is a constant in my life. He is always there, always happy, always supportive. He is a true blessing in disguise.
--Ian, age 14
- I didn't know I needed a brother and when he was born I still didn't know he was a blessing. But as we grow up together, he helped me so much. I knew I had to protect him and that kept me out of the gang. My brother was a blessing.
--Brian, age 14
- One of the gifts that came to me as a blessing in disguise was Tony, my male Family-Teacher, helping me learn how to do my homework. If you do your homework, good things come to you. I learned that if you don't do your homework, you turn out dumb. I am very grateful.
--Connor, age 14
- One blessing I didn't think I needed was my track coach. She was tough. She wouldn't let me quit. She pushed me and pushed me. Looking back, she gave me a blessing, the blessing of never giving up.
--Gina, age 16

- I always hated church services. I never went before Boys Town. I was wasting my time there for an hour. Then I started to listen in religion class and turned my heart to God. A blessing in disguise. --Dustin, age 16
- The blessing I received and didn't know I needed was to learn how to pray. They told me when I came about Father Flanagan's saying, "Every boy must learn to pray. How he prays is up to him." I thought it was kind of stupid until I discovered it brought me a sense of peace and really changed my life. --Bianca, age 15

In this Thanksgiving season, please remember to be grateful for the blessings you didn't know you needed but which came to you anyway.

6. A Thanksgiving Day Prayer

Lord,

We humbly ask Thy blessing
on the turkey and the dressing,
on the yams and cranberry jelly,
and the pickles from the deli.

Bless the apple pie and tea,
Bless each and every calorie.
Let us enjoy Thanksgiving dinner.
Tomorrow we can all get thinner.

For all Thy help along the way
we're thankful for this Thanksgiving day.
We're thankful too, for all our dear ones,
for the far away and near ones.

Although we may be far apart,
we're together in my heart.
Keep us in Thy loving care.
This is my Thanksgiving prayer.

P. S. Anyone who wishes may help with the dishes.