

FEAST OF THANKSGIVING, 2019

Joel 2:20-27; 1Timothy 6:6-11,17-19;

Mark 5:18-20

LOVED INTO BEING... BY GOD, BY ONE ANOTHER

I have so many things to be grateful for this Thanksgiving Day. For one thing, I'm grateful to the movie industry for releasing the wonderful movie about Mr. Rogers - **"It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood"** in time for the holiday. I think they did that specifically for Catholic priests who go to bed on the night before Thanksgiving wondering: *What am I going to preach about tomorrow that hasn't already been said about Thanksgiving?* It's a must-see movie where Mr. Rogers gets to share his wonderful message with adults. I'm also thankful for Google.com so I could google "Mr. Rogers and Thanksgiving." The only problem was the entry that came up. It was titled: ***Mr. Rogers was a 'Thanksgiving Heretic.'***

The article revealed that in his 1960 Thanksgiving series Mr. Rogers brought to his set a **poult**, the proper name for a baby turkey. This was a real adorable furry-feathered baby turkey, featured not as an entrée but as a guest on his show.



In the 1970s Mr. Rogers became a vegetarian – he ate no turkey, meat, fish or fowl. In an interview with "Vegetarian Times" he said he *wouldn't eat anything that has a mother.* For Rogers his religious conviction mandated that he treat turkeys and all God's creatures

as worthy of care and compassion. He said: *"I want to be a vehicle for God, to spread his message of love and peace,"*. (Can you imagine the guilt I felt over my attitude and disparaging remarks about all the turkeys that roam our church property every day?)

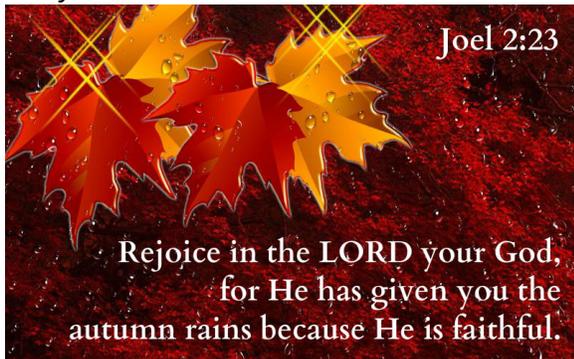
Without spoiling the movie for those who haven't seen it yet, there is a scene so powerful that even the film producers couldn't get through it without crying. The pivotal moment comes halfway through the film. Mr. Rogers is having lunch with Lloyd, the writer for Esquire Magazine who is assigned to do an interview and write an article about Mr. Rogers. Lloyd is a cynical man whose heart is burdened with a lot of lingering issues with his father. He's having a hard time believing in Mr. Rogers' authenticity and genuine kindness and compassion. In a bold move, the script directs viewers to leave the world of the film and reflect on their own lives.



As the bustle of clanking plates and lunchtime chatter lessens around them, Mr. Rogers invites Lloyd: ***"Take a minute of silence to consider the people who have loved you into being."*** For the next 60 seconds, Lloyd and Mr. Rogers sit in silence while the camera pans around the restaurant before focusing on Tom Hanks' face as he shifts his gaze from Lloyd to the audience in the theater, asking **US** to consider the most important people in our lives as well.

[May I ask you to do the same thing right now? **Let's pause for 60 seconds of silence and consider the people who have loved you into being. I'd recommend you close your eyes and place your hands on your lap in an open receptive position.**]

Thankful and joyful people of faith go back to the very beginnings of our traditions. Moses reminded the children of Israel that they were nothing but what God made them. Through no merit of their own, God brought them out of slavery to freedom and gave them a land flowing with milk and honey. So they should never arrogantly think that their successes were due to their own efforts. In response to the Lord's goodness to them, they must gratefully keep his holy Law. The prophet Joel this morning reminds us of the source of our blessings: *God is generous and has sent the autumn and spring rains in the proper seasons. Grain will cover your threshing places; jars will overflow with wine and olive oil.*



The Gospel urges us likewise to spread the good news of God's goodness: *"Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how good he has been to you." The man went away ... and began telling everyone how much Jesus had done for him.* That's exactly what Mr. Rogers said in an interview: *"I want to be a vehicle for God, to spread his message of love and peace."*

Mr. Rogers' wife once shared that he rarely mentioned his faith on "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," even though he was an ordained Presbyterian minister. She said her husband was concerned it might make some viewers in his audience feel excluded. In a 1974 Thanksgiving episode, however, Mr. Rogers dared to offer a simple prayer:

*"Thank you, God, for food to eat
and families and friends to love."*

May our Thanksgiving prayer
be as simple and as genuine as his.



*Happy Thanksgiving
from two of the two dozen turkeys
in my backyard.*

John Kasper, OSFS