



ARCHPASTORAL LETTER

OF THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE USA ON THE NATIONAL DAY OF THANKSGIVING

*Beloved in Christ, clergy, monastics, and faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA,
Christ is among us! He is and ever shall be!*

Every year, on the fourth Thursday of November, the citizens of the United States of America pause from their labor and gather around a common table for Thanksgiving Day, a civil holiday rooted in the earliest history of this nation. In the autumn of 1621, after a long and perilous journey across the ocean, the Pilgrims celebrated a meal of gratitude together with the local Indigenous people who compassionately assisted them in surviving their first harsh winter. They shared food - the most basic nourishment of life - and in doing so, they shared hope.

From that moment on, generations of Americans have linked this day with the themes of gratitude, hospitality, compassion, and unity.

In our Orthodox Christian understanding, gratitude is not merely an emotion or a polite gesture - it is a spiritual act. The Greek word Eucharist means thanksgiving. Every Divine Liturgy is an offering of thanksgiving to God, the Giver of every blessing.

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His mercy endures forever.” - *Psalm 118:1*

True gratitude is rooted not in abundance, but in the recognition that everything we possess is a gift from God. Even in times of uncertainty, trials, or suffering, thanksgiving opens our hearts to see grace at work.

This year, as we observe Thanksgiving, we cannot ignore the reality that many families are struggling. Economic instability, political tension, and social divisions weigh heavily upon the daily lives of countless people. For many in America, the rising cost of food forces difficult choices between nourishment and other basic necessities.

Food is not only a physical need - it is a symbol of life itself. When we break bread with others, we acknowledge the *image of God* in them. Our Lord taught us: “I was hungry and you gave Me food... whatever you did for the least of these, My brothers and sisters, you did unto Me.” - *Matthew 25:35, 40*. Thus, to share our food is to participate in the work of God.

As people of Ukrainian descent living in America, while we embrace this national celebration of gratitude, our conscience and our history compel us to remember another reality.

Ninety-two years ago, in 1932–1933, the government of Soviet Russia carried out a genocide against the Ukrainian people through the cruel weapon of forced starvation - the Holodomor. Up to 10 million innocent men, women, and children died because grain was seized, villages were blockaded, and people were deliberately deprived of food - the very nourishment of life.

On Thanksgiving Day, when Americans gather around tables filled with abundance, we are called to remember the millions of our ancestors in Ukraine whose tables were left empty by evil.

Two extremes stand before us:

Thanksgiving - celebrating nourishment, gratitude, and shared compassion.

Holodomor - famine imposed through hatred, greed, and dehumanization.

May the contrast awaken us. May it stir us to compassion, to action, and to the defense of human dignity everywhere food is used as a weapon.

As Orthodox Christians, we are called to be caretakers of:

- **God's Creation** - for the earth produces our nourishment.
- **Each Other** - for no person should face hunger alone.
- **Truth in History** - for silence allows evil to repeat itself.

Let our Thanksgiving table become a place of prayer and remembrance, a place where gratitude leads to action: feeding the vulnerable, supporting the poor, and defending life in every form.

May every parish this year organize or support a charitable effort: Food drives; Meals for the homeless; Assistance to families in crisis; Continued Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine and to the local Food banks, as we are inspired to do so by the Ukrainian Orthodox League's Holodomor initiative.

By doing so, we join the first Americans who shared what they had with strangers - and we honor the memory of our ancestors who were denied the bread necessary to live.

With gratitude for each of you, and with prayer that your homes may be filled with peace, love, and holy joy, we extend our archpastoral blessing.

May your Thanksgiving Day be a feast not only of food, but of compassion. Not only of celebration, but of remembrance. Not only of gratitude, but of love.

With archpastoral blessings,

Metropolitan Antony

Archbishop Daniel

A THANKSGIVING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Giver of every good gift, receive our humble thanksgiving. Bless the food before us and the hands that prepared it. Remember those who hunger today and use us as instruments of Your mercy. Strengthen us to protect the life, dignity, and freedom of every person You have created.

For You are a Merciful and Loving God and to You we give glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

