

Thaks'giving' as a spiritual practice

Dear Friends from Seattle! Isten áldjon!

I am Rev. Emese-Erzsébet Finta from Torockószentgyörgy. I was asked by Rev. Christopher Wulff if I would like to participate in today's service with a sermon and I joyfully agreed. I will start with a small prayer and then I will continue with a sermon about Thanksgiving.

Join me in a prayer!

Oh our guardian Spirit, you can see this is a different holiday. Our souls are filled with emotions, and if we are honest with ourselves, it is hard to sooth them. Too many if's, to many whys, to many if only...

We have arrived at this holiday with the desire to wash away everything that darkens our feelings and our minds, that clouds the important things in our life but when we find the power of love in our deepest darkness, we realize that **how meaningless is to care for the appearances** and how our lives are overgrown with the weed of the materialistic ways of our present.

We pray today to have wisdom on this holiday, for we need, not to forget how to be aware of the power of love, the power that washes everything that holds us back. We pray to be able to be an organic part of this holiday! We pray to accept the unacceptable, to have the certainty that all that is meaningful and truly important and even if it is often invisible to us, they are in us and create visible meaningful things.

Please give us the power to suppress the voice of discontent in us and encourage our words of thankfulness. Amen

The base of my sermon is found in second Chorinthians, 4th chapter, 18th vers.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

I came to you today with the help of the technology from a different part of the world, a different culture, but even if we are far away, there are still things that really make us more the same than different.

One such thing is Thanksgiving Day! As a Unitarian from Transylvania, I celebrate our Thanksgiving day in September and I would like to talk a little about it, and you will see by the end of my sermon, that our Thanksgiving day is very similar to yours, even if we celebrate them thousands of miles away and even on different time of the year.

Getting ready for Thanksgiving Day, for me, always started with **a statement on my behalf**. Even as a child, when I was getting ready for this holiday, I imagined in front of me how the crops from the fields, the fruits from orchards were harvested. I visualized how the hardened hands from all that hard work, of the people from the village are gently put together for praying

to God and I could almost hear the words that they spoke softly: It was a lot of hard work, sometimes the weather was bad, the conditions harsh, but I fulfilled my duties that were set upon me, and I am thankful for them. I witnessed how the farmers filled the barns with the crops, how neatly everything was put away for the winter.

As the attics, pantries and basements were stacked with the fruit of the hard labor of the people from the village, **I also prepared the attic and pantry of my soul and filled them with the fruits of my labor.** I logged my work with others, and how that work was conducted and what was the outcome of it.

I gave gratitude for whom gave me power, goodwill, faith, and partners in my work. **Until last year** this was the way I was getting ready to celebrate this holiday and to prepare myself for the sermons that I had to give. I was under the impression that my job was to convince, myself included, and everybody else for what we must be grateful to God.

I felt that with my stories, with my experience or maybe my **confessions I am able to make everybody aware for what they should be grateful to God,** to give thank you for all the gifts that were received, and how everything in our life is a blessing. Thankful for our clothes, for our food, for our partner, for our friends, family and for our freedom to do as we pleased.

And in that world under the safety of our Spirit we lived in a certain blissful life, were we had our attics and pantries full. We lived a so-called normal life, wright?

This year I was not getting ready as in the past. I do not have the intention to convince anybody for what to be thankful, because this is the second year when this holiday is different and harder then before.

We have behind us months filled with darkness, forced solitudes, uncertainty, fears, hopelessness, and sickness. Even now our souls are filled with the unknown of what is still to come. In our attics and pantries of our souls next to the crops and fruits we can now find other things, too. **If we are honest, and we must be honest, my dear friends,** we have to say it out loud what those things are: anger, pain, grief, bitterness, emptiness left by all the things that we had to give up, the countless why's, the million times of saying if only things would have been different.

We have brought a lot with us today. We brought our joy and gratefulness; we brought our sorrow and pain and because of this, I feel that it is not my place to convince anybody for what should they be thankful. Today it is not my place to make you see why you should be grateful to a higher power, to God or Spirit.

Today I just want to talk about, and share with you, **the journey** that took me to this Holiday. And I believe that you will discover yourself in it.

I will call the last period as **darkness** because darkness is uncertainty and hopelessness. Today we start to see a bit of light and dawn has arrived, but we still are stumbling, feeling our way around.

Think of the journey, all the steps that we took to arrive to this point. Think of those many times when the darkness was lit for a little time, when from our deepest inner self, a message arrived. A message, that gave you light in the darkness, when you realized what is

important to you, what is worth living for and what is not. **When you realized to what should you devote your energy, time, and love.**

In the darkness I have had, and I believe you have had also moments when you questioned the existence of God, a higher Spirit. We quarreled, we blamed. **But we were never alone. His presence was always with us,** a constant to our ever-changing life.

My dear friends, until now I was just suspecting, but now, I think I know it, that most of the people, all of us maybe, we all live for the things that are seen. We hold on with teeth and nail to what we can see and touch. But the last period with all that it has brought, I believe it made us realize that the things that are important to us, even essential, are the ones unseen and all that is seen is fleeting! What is eternal is unseen.

Life, beauty, youth is fleeting. Happiness, safety is momentary. Today, tomorrow is temporary, passing by quickly. Plenty of stuff that we couldn't even imagine our life without, have become transient and everything has changed.

Everything is under constant change: our beliefs, our gratitude, our life philosophy, our faith in society, and, we change as the world changes around us.

One moment we are here, one moment we are there, we are constantly moving, changing and in all this **there is only one constant and one certainty. With unconditional care, with his constant presence: God.**

All that is seen is important, but not as important that the unseen. In our life we should put in first place the unseen, because that will enrich our lives infinitely more than the seen ones.

The last, almost two years, were the years of **relearning** and this holiday is when we learn again to give thanks – to be grateful for the eternal constant, to be grateful for the unseen, to learn again *what the ears did not hear, what the eyes did not see, what the heart did not feel,* just like **Paul** the apostle had said.

And maybe our eyes have seen too much, to still see. Our ears have heard too much, to still hear. Our hands have touched too much, to still feel. Our hearts had too many heartbreaks to be able to hope. **We cried out from the darkness, and we were heard!**

This is not the perfect Thanksgiving Holiday, with all the distancing, and carefulness, but this is the perfect time to have a hard look inside of us. Maybe this is the time to wake up and focus more on the unseen. Maybe this is the time when you speak with all the brokenness, pain and revolt that you have inside of you, that you are thankful for what you have. That you are thankful that you **have made this far,** and you are thankful for the journey that brought you here, and thankful for the companions that you had along the way.

This was a hard time that we had, and this holiday is not like the ones that we had in the old days, but dear God, we are still here and we are still doing our best and try to accomplish the tasks that were set upon us.

My dear friends, let us just be alone with the great Spirit, and express with our greatest sincerity, that we cannot be thankful for the last period, we cannot be thankful for what we had to give up, **but we can be grateful for the power that we received to be able to get through all that hardship.** Grateful for the unseen love, that compels people to achieve wonderful things.

Grateful for God for being a certainty in all that is uncertain, giver of hope in hopelessness, for being present when we are ungrateful, and forget what is truly important. Grateful for being there in the past, for being here in the present, - in the constantly changing world as the true constant.

AMEN