

32963 Faith Column for 11-24-11

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### ***Extravagant Thanks***

How are you at saying thanks? It's one thing to write a note or make a phone call to offer thanks to friends and family. But it's quite another matter to figure out how to say thanks to God, isn't it? How do you do it? The fall of the year is a handy time for people of faith because we have a built-in holiday to stimulate our expression of gratitude. We have Thanksgiving – a time to celebrate the bounty of creation and all that we have been given by God. And the typical Thanksgiving celebration is, of course, a feast.

Each year when we prepare our Thanksgiving feast to share with our loved ones, we can't help but recall a favorite film of ours, *Babette's Feast*. It's a stunning Danish Academy Award winning movie from 1987. The setting of the film is a barren, windswept coastal village of Denmark in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The village is populated by a very conservative and pious community of Protestant believers. It is led by two elderly sisters who struggle to maintain the faithfulness and the spirit of the community, which is aging and growing quarrelsome. When Babette, a political refugee from Paris, turns up in their village, the sisters charitably take her in and make her their housekeeper. They ask Babette to cook their very simple fare, for extravagance of any kind is suspect, and enjoyment of worldly pleasures (including lavish eating and drinking) is sinful.

For fourteen years the three women live together amicably. Then Babette, quite astonishingly, receives a letter from a friend in Paris saying that she has won the Parisian lottery. She asks the sisters if she can use her winnings to prepare a feast for them, in thanks for all they have given her over the past fourteen years. They reluctantly agree.

What the sisters did not know was that prior to fleeing Paris, Babette had been a famous chef. With her lottery winnings she imports china and crystal, wines and rare foods, to prepare a dinner for the village as magnificent as the meals she made as a Parisian chef.

Initially the sisters and the townsfolk are reluctant to enjoy the feast. They fear it is indulgent and dangerous. But as this meal progresses, it has an incredible effect on those present. This meal marked by stunning beauty, savory tastes, and lavish generosity elicits joy and laughter. Apologies are made around the table and old wounds are healed. Wonder is aroused at the breathtaking gifts of life. For the villagers, Babette's feast becomes an occasion of utter grace. Their cramped and worried hearts are opened to life's goodness and God's gifts, all because of the experience of a blessed, shared meal.

Now whenever we cook a Thanksgiving meal, we remember that film and pray our meal may serve the same function as Babette's feast did. We hope that our Thanksgiving meal may be a real occasion of grace – when everyone present discovers anew the extravagant gifts of God, and in our enjoyment of them, stops to offer extravagant thanks. And we pray your feast this year will be just that life-enhancing, too!

Happy Thanksgiving!