

God, Life, and Everything "A World of Thanks"

There are so many things to write about this week, that it is almost impossible to figure out how to touch on them all.

Surely, you're thinking, there's only one topic of interest this week - Thanksgiving.

But no! There's more!

Just last week, for example, I stopped in at Dunkin' Donuts for "Coffee with a Cop." Actually, there were at least a dozen cops. At first, it was a little intimidating, but knowing that their goal is to provide a chance for community members to get to know officers better is a valuable cause. Chief Paolilli told me that it was not only good for citizens to see cops as just regular people, but it was a good way to remind police that the people they serve are also just regular people. When the majority of interaction you have with each other is under negative circumstances, it's easy for both to forget our mutual humanity. So I applaud this.

Oh, and then there's last Sunday's Community Thanksgiving Dinner. What fun that was! More than a hundred folks from all walks of life came together for remarkable food - with a friendly ambience. There was great music provided by FDR High School students, and volunteers serving in any number of capacities.

There are, of course, the things on the darker side. The Syrian refugee crisis, brought to an ugly head by the ISIS attacks in France, has divided the country. Should we quit accepting the refugees? Should we detain them in camps? Should we open our arms and welcome them?

And finally, not only does this week herald the holiday of Thanksgiving, but it also brings in the season of Advent. Yes, Advent begins this Sunday! It's not a big deal for a lot of Christians, but for many of us, it is a sacred, reflective time of watching, waiting, and preparing for Christ to come - not as just a baby, but as a powerful force in our hearts.

These things are so varied in both importance and focus that it's hard to see a common bond. But here it is. They elicit thanks.

Just look at it. Coffee with a Cop shows us that they really want a good relationship with the people here. All people. In the tense times we live in, where trust between police and community is seemingly at a historic low, this helps. My hope is that it will be a long-term effort, and that all citizens will both meet and share concerns with officers.

It will use some tweaking, of course, but I am thankful for this effort.

In the same way, I'm thankful for that dinner. When you get so many community members working together - not to raise money for anything but just to be together as a community - that is a joy! So, I'm thankful for the entire group who put it together.

Even when we consider the Syrian refugees and the murderers who made them refugees (and terrorize us), there is room for thanks. I am thankful that I do not live in Syria, that I do not have to struggle to survive, that I do not have to leave behind everything I love and hold dear in order to protect my family. And I am thankful that I have an opportunity as a citizen of this remarkably blessed country to help those in true need.

Finally, I am thankful for the blessing that is this wonderful season of Advent. More on that in coming weeks, but for now, let it suffice to say that observing Advent is radically countercultural. We don't sing Christmas Carols in Advent. We don't say "Merry Christmas" in Advent. We don't talk about shopping. Rather, we quiet down. We become reflective, pondering our lives and our need for God. It is a lot like pregnancy - which we think of at this time of year - because it is a season when we prepare ourselves spiritually for the coming Christ.

All these busy things, all so very different but powerfully important, are occasions of giving thanks.

So let me say to you, Happy Thanksgiving! Look around you in this crazy world, and you will find reason to give thanks, too.