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Thanksgiving Day, 1986

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Perhaps no custom reveals our character as a Nation so clearly as our celebration of Thanksgiving Day. Rooted deeply in our Judeo-Christian heritage, the practice of offering thanksgiving underscores our unshakeable belief in God as the foundation of our Nation and our firm reliance upon Him from Whom all blessings flow. Both as individuals and as a people, we join with the Psalmist in song and praise: "Give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good."

One of the most inspiring portrayals of American history is that of George Washington on his knees in the snow at Valley Forge. That moving image personifies and testifies to our Founders' dependence upon Divine Providence during the darkest hours of our Revolutionary struggle. It was then—when our mettle as a Nation was tested most severely—that the Sovereign and Judge of nations heard our plea and came to our assistance in the form of aid from France. Thereupon General Washington immediately called for a special day of thanksgiving among his troops.

Eleven years later, President Washington, at the request of the Congress, first proclaimed November 26, 1789, as Thanksgiving Day. In his Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, President Washington exhorted the people of the United States to observe "a day of public thanksgiving and prayer" so that they might acknowledge "with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness." Washington also reminded us that "it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor."

Today let us take heart from the noble example of our first President. Let us pause from our many activities to give thanks to Almighty God for our bountiful harvests and abundant freedoms. Let us call upon Him for continued guidance and assistance in all our endeavors. And let us ever be mindful of the faith and spiritual values that have made our Nation great and that alone can keep us great. With joy and gratitude in our hearts, let us sing those stirring stanzas:

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties,
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, in the spirit of George Washington and the Founders, do hereby proclaim Thursday, November 27, 1986, as a National Day of Thanksgiving, and I call upon every citizen of this great Nation to gather together in homes and places of worship on that day of thanks to affirm by their prayers and their gratitude the many blessings bestowed upon this land and its people.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this thirteenth day of October, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and eleventh.

Ronald Reagan