

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Saying Grace

In Norman Rockwell's famous painting, a woman and a little boy are shown in a roadside diner, heads bowed, saying grace, while those around them watch in wonder. Seen anything like that lately?

A writer of the blog *American Digest* has:

"As I got up to leave, the family of six at the long table across from me was served with the swift flourish and satisfied air of presentation that is the style of serving these days. There was food steaming in front of them, but none of them made a move towards it. Instead, they talked quietly among themselves and seemed to come to a decision. They made their selection from among them. It was to be one of the daughters, a girl of about seventeen, I guessed. The din in the restaurant rose and fell, but the family of six sat quietly and then bowed their heads as one. Then they said grace.

"... I had, I thought, never seen this before in a restaurant. I'd seen it in private homes, to be sure, but upon reflection I realized that I'd not seen it there in quite some time. And I was quite sure this was, for me, a rare event. I'd probably not been paying attention since it no doubt went on all the time, but still it was a startling moment."

That essay sparked some dialogue and debate in the blogosphere: Just how rare is grace? (The table kind, not the actual or sanctifying kind.)

I admit, it is a strange sight to behold in the restaurants and eateries of New York City. No place is more religiously inclusive—or more decidedly and stubbornly secular. People may wear yarmulkes or finger beads or pass out pamphlets on the subway. But you almost never see anyone at a public table bowing a head to thank God for what they are about to receive, Amen.

My wife and I have made grace a daily practice at home, before almost any meal, and we've also taken that practice out into the street to restaurants or diners. No one ever says anything about it. Once, I met a Jesuit friend for lunch at a diner in Manhattan; after our sandwiches came, he said, "Would you like to say grace?" And we did. I'm not sure anyone even noticed.

This week, we are preparing to celebrate Thanksgiving—one of the few national civil holidays with an implicitly religious message. (If you doubt it, just ask yourself: *Who* do you think is being thanked?) But that acknowledgment of God, in whatever manner one believes in Him, will go largely unmentioned in the public square.

My modest proposal: Don't let that happen. If you find yourself in a restaurant this Thanksgiving, take a moment to let the turkey cool and the stuffing settle, and bow your head, and give thanks. Acknowledge The One who has given this bounty. Mention those who prepared it, and those who are going without, and ask God to watch over the world as the skies darken and the air freezes and more people brace themselves for a winter without shelter or warmth. Say "Amen" and look at those around you, and at what is before you, and feel that flush of gratitude that can only be summed up with one word: **Grace**.

There. You will have said it. And you will have received it. And that gesture of giving thanks will remind you, and those around you, of what Thanksgiving truly means.

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