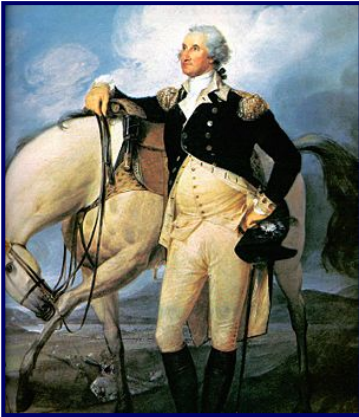


Washington's Thanksgiving



It is not uncommon today to hear some people claim that the Founding Fathers did not establish the United States as a Christian nation. While it is true that the country does not have an official or legally preferred religion or church, any student of history must recognize that the United States – its institutions and laws – was founded on Biblical principles basic to Christianity and to Judaism from which it flowed. The fundamental basis of this nation's laws was given to Moses on the Mount. The origin of our Bill of Rights comes from the teachings we get from Exodus and Saint Matthew, from Isaiah and Saint Paul.

One primary example of the faith of our founders comes from George Washington, the general who led the fledgling country to victory in the Revolutionary War and became its first President. He is often referred to as the Father of Our Country, and appropriately so.

At age 20, Washington wrote prayers to say each morning and evening. On Sunday mornings, he prayed: "Pardon, I beseech Thee, my sins; remove them from Thy presence, as far as the east is from the west, and accept me for the merits of Thy Son, Jesus Christ." At 23, Capt. Washington was caught in a surprise ambush by the French and Indians near what is now Pittsburgh. Every British and American soldier was shot but Washington, although he rode back and forth across the battlefield. Washington later wrote to his brother, "By the all-powerful dispensations of Providence, I have been protected beyond all human probability of expectation, for I had four bullets through my coat, and two horses shot under me, yet escaped unhurt, although death was leveling my companions on every side of me."



On July 2, 1776, he told his troops: "The fate of unborn millions will now depend, under God, on the courage of this army." Seven weeks later, British Gen. Howe had trapped Washington and his 8,000 troops on Brooklyn Heights, ready to crush them the next morning. Washington gathered every vessel from fishing to row boats and spent all night ferrying his army across the East River. By morning, many troops were still exposed to the British.

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“In a most unusual change in weather, the fog did not lift from the river. It stayed thick, covering Washington’s retreat until the entire army had evacuated and escaped,” writes William Federer in his inspiring book, *America’s God and Country*. Never again did the British have such a rare chance to win the war. During the freezing winter of 1777 at Valley Forge, a dozen soldiers died a day, with many not having blankets or shoes. A Quaker named Isaac Potts came upon Washington upon his knees in the snow, praying aloud for his beloved country. He thanked God for exalting him to the head of a great nation which was fighting at fearful odds.



In 1781, Washington’s southern army defeated a detachment of British troops. Lord Cornwallis was infuriated and began pursuing the outnumbered Americans. He waited the night at Catawba River, which U.S. troops had crossed just two hours earlier. Miraculously, a storm arose during the night, causing the river to be uncrossable for five days. Cornwallis nearly overtook Americans at the Yadkin River, but another flood arose, allowing the Americans to escape. The French navy – France had joined America as an ally – seized control of the Chesapeake on Aug. 30, 1781, driving out British ships. Washington rejoiced and besieged Cornwallis’ stronghold at Yorktown. With no ships to escape upon, Cornwallis surrendered, and the war effectively ended.



Washington wrote Congress, “I take particular pleasure in acknowledging that the interposing Hand of Heaven ... has been most conspicuous and remarkable.” Washington had more near escapes than victories. God had protected him from bullets, and saved his troops with fog and floods.

What does all this have to do with the Thanksgiving holiday before us? With this background, it becomes clear why Washington, in his first year as President of the United States, issued a proclamation on Oct. 3, 1789, setting aside Thursday, Nov. 26, as “A Day of Public Thanksgiving and Prayer.” In it, Washington writes: “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.”

In this Thanksgiving season, as we pray individually or with our families, it would do us well to include our gratitude for these blessings President Washington found important for his own life and for that of the new country he helped establish.