Thanksgiving is usually associated with the pilgrims of the Massachusetts Bay colony in the 17th century. However, the national celebration to be held on the last Thursday of November was instituted by Abraham Lincoln in 1863.

It is ironic the secular holiday most beloved by Americans came about in the worst moment of our nation’s history. When Lincoln declared the first Thanksgiving Day we were in the midst of the Civil War. Tens of thousands of casualties on both sides had been suffered, and many more would come before the end of the war.

His Thanksgiving proclamation asked citizens to be grateful for God’s blessings, and to seek the Lord’s help. Lincoln wrote, “we commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it…”

Gratitude rooted in faith is not based on the notion that everything is fine. Rather, giving thanks is an attitude that flows from our relationship with God. Whatever the circumstance, we live firm in the knowledge of the God who made us and loves us.

Fr. Dan White, S.J.