

# Giving thanks for ‘all things in good plenty’

When Mary Chilton first spotted the New World in November 1620, the 13-year-old had been aboard the Mayflower for 10 weeks, stuck in the same clothes and cramped in dark, damp quarters among seasick passengers and dying goats. Each family was allotted one storage trunk for all their possessions.

Imagine the terror and thrill of squinting at Cape Cod’s thickets.

Mary earned the distinction of being the first European woman to set foot on Plymouth Rock.

The week before Christmas, her father died. Three weeks after Christmas, the illness they called the “general sickness” had claimed her mother. Only half of the Mayflower’s 102 passengers lived to see spring in Massachusetts.

Mary marked her 14th birthday as an orphan, grasping the ways of a foreign land, where the Wampanoag Indians offered guideposts: how to grow corn, catch fish, extract maple sap and identify poisonous plants.

She was present at what we consider the first Thanksgiving, a three-day feast called for by Governor William Bradford to celebrate a successful corn harvest. The Plymouth colonists were joined by their teachers, the Wampanoag, who arrived with five deer. They cooked wild duck over an open flame, feasted on seasoned corn and gave thanks: for their harvest, for their friendship, and ultimately, for their survival.

Governor Bradford chronicled it all, writing: “Thus they found the Lord to be with them in all their ways and to bless their outgoings and incomings, for which let his holy name have the praise forever to all posterity. They began now to gather in the small harvest they had and to fit up their houses and dwellings against winter, being all well recovered in health and strength and had all things in good plenty ... .”

The general sickness had ceased. Their food was hot, their faith, intact. It was hard for him to fathom what more they could possibly want. It was, to him, “all things in

good plenty.”

It takes an awful lot to make 21st-century Americans decide we have “all things in good plenty.” We haven’t really got there. We’re still upgrading our vehicles, filling our basements and then paying to store the overflow.

It’s hard to see much of the first Thanksgiving in our 390th, with stuffing and pie and football on big-screen TVs.

But I’m trying to look back. I have such awe for the pioneers who paved the way – saints and settlers, miners and mothers.

I’m praying with St. Francis de Sales, who said: “Give me one more thing, O Lord: a grateful heart.” I know that can cover and cure every matter, turning my portion into “all things in good plenty.”

I’m giving thanks while hoping for a life as full and rich as Mary Chilton’s, who married and delivered 10 children. She died an old lady who had raised a family, welcomed grandkids and written a will. In it, she accounted for six white aprons, three pocket handkerchiefs, two leather chairs and a brass candlestick.

Mary understood what really counted. “Knowing the uncertainty of this present life and being desirous to settle that outward estate the Lord hath lent me, I do make this make this my last will and testament,” she wrote. “First and principally, I commend my soul into the hands of Almighty God, my Creator.”

Here’s to putting first things first.

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