**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
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IN REPLY REFER TO
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Ser N097/01331
20 Nov 01

Dear Colleagues:

With the approach of Thanksgiving Day, I could offer you the traditional wish for a happy holiday. But how out of place the traditional seems this year amid the lingering grief and anxiety that have descended upon our Nation. The very idea of "celebrating" a holiday, especially one devoted to gratitude, seems senseless in the shadows of death, destruction, and fear.

And yet….

Perhaps we are closer to corporate thanksgiving than we have been for years. Consider the origins of America's Thanksgiving Day: Our ancestors, seeking to live their convictions and to pursue the benefits hard work and sacrifice could produce, found themselves in dangerous circumstances that cost the lives of loved ones and neighbors. They faced a new world of uncertainty for which they were ill prepared. They had suffered and lost much already. The future, if there was to be one, seemed grim. And so they gathered together—and gave thanks.

Genuine gratitude often grows out of the recognition of inadequacy and need. Genuine gratitude recognizes that we are not strong enough, brave enough, rich enough, smart enough, or good enough to solve all our problems—to meet all our needs. The Pilgrims—and the Jamestown settlers before them—dug a lot of graves for the loved ones they had lost, but *they* were still alive. And they gave thanks for that. They knew they didn't know how to handle their crises, but they found an unexpected friendship in people very different from themselves, people who sustained them through the worst times. And they gave thanks for that, too.

Great prosperity and the absence of credible threats to our persons and our property tend to raise our expectations and dull our appreciative senses. When we have all we want and can fulfill all our desires, it is all too easy to celebrate our good fortune and short change the Benefactor whose generosity and power form the basis of our well being. It is all too easy to make Thanksgiving a tidy package of self-satisfaction: a big day with family, a big meal on the table, and a big game on TV.

But not this year—not after September 11th.

Oh, families will get together, but this year they will hold each other closer and thank God there were not more victims in more families. Food will fill many tables, but this year, those around the table will give thanks that the economic losses our Nation has suffered did not reach to their tables as well. There will be games to watch and games to play, but this year, Americans will give thanks for God's protection of our citizens, both military and civilian, engaged on our behalf in deadly contests at home and around the world.

Light shines all the brighter in the darkness. This year, our God has shown us His incredibly redemptive power and grace in the midst of breathtaking evil. In the midst of our sorrow—in the midst of our fears—we have reasons for gratitude. So let us thank our God, and lead our neighbors to do the same.

BC Black

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