



Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

November 25, 2025

Dear Confreres,

In his heyday, it was said that every word the English poet and novelist Rudyard Kipling wrote was worth twenty-five shillings. Hearing this, a group of college students wrote to him: "We understand that every word you write is worth twenty-five shillings. Enclosed is twenty-five shillings; please send us your best word." A few days later, they received a telegram from Mr. Kipling containing only one word—"Thanks!"

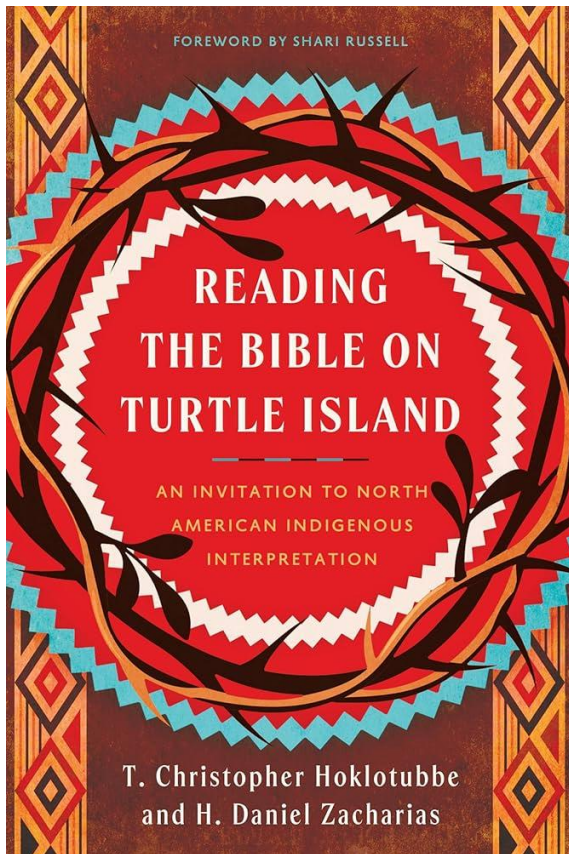
Perhaps that really is the best word in English or in any language. Gratitude and thankfulness are the most precious gifts that we can cultivate.



As Thanksgiving approaches, we give thanks: to God who called us; to our families who formed us; to our deceased SCJ confreres who built the province; to our religious community for forming us; to our benefactors for their generosity; and to our collaborators who share in our mission. All of these blessings we offer in the Eucharist—our deepest act of thanksgiving.

We gather for Thanksgiving mindful of the early encounters between newly arrived European immigrants and Native peoples—moments that profoundly changed the Native peoples' nationhood and culture. For centuries, Native Americans have faced mistreatment: from land theft and broken treaties to forced removals, boarding and residential schools, the loss of sovereignty, and the exploitation of resources on Native lands.

St. Joseph's Indian School is aware of these histories. Preserving and sharing Native American culture and tradition is now a core part of the school's mission. Its cultural and educational philosophy is to celebrate our students' Native American heritage through language, ceremony, dance, and other traditional activities. I believe St. Joe's is helping our students deepen their understanding of their cultural heritage and reclaim it with dignity and pride.



Recently, I received *Reading the Bible on Turtle Island*, a book that brings Indigenous perspectives into dialogue with Scripture. "Turtle Island," a name used by many Native nations for North America, invites us to read biblical stories—such as Jesus' time in the wilderness—alongside Indigenous worldviews, histories, and experiences, such as the vision quest. The book highlights creation's sacredness, community and relationality, and gratitude. I met the authors at the recent Society of Biblical Literature meetings and was enriched by their insights at one of the sessions on their book.

As I read this book and reflect on Thanksgiving, I often wonder what our first SCJ missionaries in South Dakota experienced: how they prepared, what challenges they faced, and how they connected with Native traditions. We are thankful for the many Native peoples who welcomed them and those who came after.

Kipling was right: *Thanks* may indeed be the best word we have.

Wishing you all a blessed and Happy Thanksgiving.