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We Americans have been through some rough times over the past year. Still many, including me, are optimistic that things will get better. Besides, we are Americans and we know from experience that adversity makes us stronger.

Think back to 1776, when our forefathers pledged their lives, their fortunes (and not all had a fortune!) and their sacred honor to gain independence from tyranny. Then in the 1860's, the grisly Civil War often pitted family member against family member, friend against friend, and left thousands dead on the battlefields. The First World War; the Second World War; Korean War, and Vietnam War also brought tragedy and economic disaster to previous generations of families and businesses.

Each of these historic events challenged us as Americans. Each event challenged our beliefs in freedom and liberty. Each time our courage and commitment to what we stand for as Americans was challenged.

Every generation has had its own unique challenges brought on by war, social injustice and political strife. Now we have ours. How we respond should be no different than how generations before us did.

To do so, we can draw strength and encouragement from those who have gone before us.

Abraham Lincoln and Ronald Reagan are two I often turn to. Though shouldering unbelievable burdens and unbearable decisions as presidents of the United States, these courageous leaders stood firm in their belief in freedom and liberty. They believed in the goodness of the American people, and trusted people would do the right thing.

In 1858 Abraham Lincoln said, "What constitutes the bulwark of our own liberty and independence? It is not our crowning battlements, our bristling sea coasts, the guns of our war steamers, or the strength of our gallant and disciplined army...Our reliance is in the *love of liberty* which God has

implanted in us...Destroy this spirit, and you have planted the seeds of despotism at your own doors.”

One hundred and twenty five years later Ronald Reagan said, “This must be an agenda that opens the gates of freedom so all people can go as far as their God-given talents will take them. For every legal and economic action we consider, I ask: Will this serve to liberate and empower the individual; will it encourage us to reach for the stars, or will it weaken us and drag us down into submission and dependence?”

So, as American families gather around the Thanksgiving table, in addition to giving thanks for all the blessings of the food before us, and family gathered ‘round , let us also give thanks for the blessings of being Americans.

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