

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

Reflection – Harvest Festival

3rd October 2021

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But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Harvest Festivals have been around for a very long time. Looking back through history, most cultures, including the Ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, all kept rituals involving the natural world. Many anthropologists believe such celebrations date back to the very early days of human development, when humans began to understand how to use the seasons to grow food.

But although many cultures and religions have had harvest celebrations, often going back over many centuries, the modern English celebrations we know were only formed in the middle of the nineteenth century. Lammas Day celebrations may go back to pre-Reformation days, but this was a commemoration at the beginning of the gathering of the harvest, at the beginning of August.

We may be unsure of the full meaning and aspects of early harvest celebrations, but it's likely three things were fairly common, even if they varied in their meaning and observance. First of all there would be a worshipful recognition and respect for various aspects of the natural world: a kind of adoration. Some form of thanksgiving would follow, and finally a request or prayer for future harvests.

I once had a parishioner who exemplified this approach. His wife and children were regular worshipers. But he couldn't stand all this "*Bible, Church and Jesus stuff.*" His pride and joy was his allotment, where he said he found God. So he would come to the church at Harvest Festival, to thank God for his success in growing the family's fruit and vegetables, and to pray for his time on the soil during the coming

year. This same Adoration, Thanksgiving and Prayer are, or should be, at the centre of our Christian Harvest celebration today.

Over the past month, in our travels across France and Ireland, Christine and I have experienced much of the richness of God's wonderful variety in creation; from the hillsides of Provence and the open agricultural plains of Northern France to the rich greenness of the wet Emerald Isle and the brilliant blues of the wild Atlantic.

Adoration reveres the true essence of something for what it is, giving it its full meaning and value, as God has created it to be: something well reflected in this morning's reading from the Book of Joel: *Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things! Do not fear, you animals of the field, (which might include we humans), for the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and the vine give their full yield.* This echoes the constant refrain in the Genesis creation story; *God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.* Adoration of the natural world acknowledges the perfection of God's Creation.

This may help us to understand the often misquoted line in today's reading from the first Letter of Timothy: *For the **love** of money is a root of all kinds of evil.* Money is not an evil in itself: it can be a just and convenient means of exchanging goods and services, and can express value and worth. Misuse happens when money is loved and adored for itself as a kind of idol. So as part of our Harvest Festival, rather than thinking of money as 'the root of all evil', we might instead give thanks for the gift of money, and pray that we be guided to put it to its proper use.

As we bring forward our harvest gifts, let's be thankful for the harvest the past year has brought us - and at the same time be conscious of how we can so easily be tempted to misuse God's generosity. Have we accumulated too much for ourselves? Have we worked for a just sharing of what the harvest has produced? Choosing how we distribute our harvest gifts, both as individuals and as a church is an opportunity to reflect on how we share what life has given us.

In our prayer and liturgical life, adoration should always lead to thanksgiving. Today's Gospel reading begins the words, *Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?* Here Jesus calls on us to live in trust, with a thankful heart for all that we've been given. If we

choose, we can worry and fret about daily life, but where will that lead us? Thanksgiving and hope can and should be more prominent in our lives than doubt and despair. Our opening hymn this morning, begins, *Come ye thankful people come, raise the song of harvest home.* The abundance and goodness of God's wonderful creation gives so much for which we should be giving thanks and a truly thankful heart seeks and works for a better world. True Harvest prayer goes beyond a wish for a better allotment production next year! We ask instead that the wonder and abundance of this year may be justly and generously shared by the whole of humanity. A just, fair and common sharing of God's creation is central to the Kingdom of God. This is what Jesus has in mind, when in our opening text he says,

But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Amen.