

Reflection on the Harvest :

Dear Friends, We are coming to the end of the summer period of visitors, holidays, village fêtes and Rentrée is looming up. Harvests are still in progress but it is a good time for us, as Christians, to offer thanks to God for all that we have, our food, our health, our friends and family. So often we take it all for granted and only occasionally reflect on where we are – hugely blessed!

We will celebrate the festival of Harvest in the Chapel on 31st of August and at the end of September we will celebrate Creation. It is a time for thankfulness and delight. Thankfulness that is *truly* felt leads us to delight- a step we often stop short of. It seems we sell thankfulness short because we prefer to believe our lives lie in our hands. Only when things are hard do we naturally turn to God. Perhaps we can learn from the words of Paschal- ‘instead of complaining that God had hidden himself, give Him thanks for having revealed so much of Himself.’ that is both in the gifts of Harvest and the beauty of Creation.

I am told ‘studies have shown that being thankful improves our physical and emotional health. Holding on to feelings of thankfulness boosts our immune system and increases blood supply to our heart. Daily guided exercises or the habit of keeping a weekly gratitude journal can increase our alertness, enthusiasm, and energy, and improve our sleep. People who describe themselves as feeling grateful tend to suffer less stress and depression than the rest of the population.’ Perhaps we should make more effort to verify this claim. What I do know is cultivating a spirit of thankfulness honors God and strengthens our faith.

Over the past weeks and months we have in our community seen parishioners engage in raising funds for charities both those sponsored by our Church community and other good causes. We have seen immense generosity in helping with our heating to make our worship more comfortable in the depths of winter. All these actions I applaud. But thankfulness is more than a donation here and there it is something that should be central to our prayers. Sacrificial giving, that is when you have to forego something in order to give as a token of thanks, is something we miss the mark on.

Stewardship is it seems a word that makes Churches recoil. It should not. It makes us uncomfortable, and we all have a hundred reasons not to make any commitment to planned giving. Yet we expect God’s commitment. Our covenant with Him is a two-way thing.

Funds raised by Stewardship do not slip into profligate pockets but are carefully managed and used for the propagation of the Gospel message. In our community we have those who are committed to stewardship and give in a planned way. But many still have a pay-as-you-go approach to giving and perhaps if a collection bag were not waived under our noses at services no giving would ever be made. Gratitude is not pay-as-you-go! It is a symbol of commitment however small or large- it is not the amount that is important but the *commitment*, that commitment demonstrating our commitment to discipleship.

Come with delight to worship God for the fruits of Harvest and to celebrate the wonders of God’s Creation to recommit ourselves to discipleship and to share the joy of fellowship. Come with trust that our God is ever present and knows our needs. Come with the true humility and thankfulness that leads to delight. Come, on the 31st of August, as thankful people, to raise the song of harvest home.

Your friend
Michael