

Harvest - October 2017 - All Saints Vendée

Today we celebrate Harvest Festival. As we are living in France the harvest – exceptionally early this year – is long over and our French neighbours may find our celebrating today somewhat strange, but our readings today remind us that God gives us everything, lovingly supplying all our needs and inviting us to thank Him for his goodness and to share the riches He gives us with others. In this way we will be blessed and in turn become a blessing to others.

It all sounds simple, but in reality, especially in our increasingly materialistic world, it is not always that easy.

Do you remember the story of the young man who came to Jesus and asked Him what he must do to inherit eternal life? Mk 10 17ff

When Jesus told him to keep the commandments he is able to say that he has kept them since he was a child. Jesus then looks at him and Mark says that He loved him. Then He tells him to sell everything he has and give to the poor and he will have treasure in heaven then to come and follow Him.

The young man is very rich and can't make the sacrifice. He goes away sadly and we hear no more of him.

Jesus tells His disciples that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, harder than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. But when the disciples ask who will be saved, Jesus points out with God all things are possible.

Our OT reading is a beautiful, poetic account of God's provision for our needs.

He leads the people to the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and promises that there they will be blessed in abundance with all they will need. But there is always a danger in being blessed and our passage underlines it. We can come to believe that we are being rewarded for our own efforts. We get what we deserve rather than what God in His love for us graciously chooses to give us.

When we do this we forget God and no longer thank Him for His generous gifts because what we have come to believe we have earned them and they are our right and just deserts.

This problem is clearly stated in the gospel parable. It is not without reason that it is often called the parable of the rich fool. He is already so rich that the harvest will not fit into his barns. He has more than enough to meet his needs but what does he do when faced with an abundant harvest? No thought of sharing the bounty of his blessings with others less fortunate than himself. No, he wants to keep it all for himself, so he will pull down his barns and build bigger ones to accommodate the bumper crop.

Little does he know that another of God's gifts which he has always taken for granted – his life – will be taken from him that very night.

We celebrate harvest to thank God for His provision and also to share of our riches with others, less fortunate than ourselves. In doing so we honour God, follow His command to love our neighbour as ourselves and face down the risk of becoming possessed by our possessions like the man in the parable.

Many years ago, when I was a curate in NE London, harvest gifts were divided up and distributed to the poor. In the affluent area where I worked the curate was arguably one of the poorest and duly received a gift. Sadly this is not the case today when thousands of people live below the poverty line and depend on gifts, not just once a year at harvest time but throughout the year, through food banks, luncheon clubs and the like.

This is why I chose to begin with the story of the rich young man. Living in the fortunate west, nearly all of us are rich beyond measure compared with the majority of the world's population of whom 2.4 billion have no toilet, between 25 and 33% no access to clean water and 40% not enough to eat. 20% of us share 80% of the world's riches, and only a tiny percentage of obscenely rich have the majority of them.

What we have has been given to us by God. He loves us and provides for our needs. This is the essence of Jesus's teaching to the disciples after His telling of the parable. He calls us not to worry, to have faith, to trust and God will

provide. His care of His creation is His guarantee that He will do the same for us.

Ironically those in the world who have the least find it easier to do this than we do. They know the truth contained in today's epistle. They cannot provide for themselves, so they have to trust in God, even literally for their daily bread as Jesus taught them, and us, to pray. Even when it fails to come they still trust and are ready to share the little they have, knowing that this brings blessing and is a powerful witness to the love and grace of God. It is not surprising that it is precisely in these areas, which we so easily dismiss as underdeveloped, that the number of Christians is growing rapidly.

They do not have our problem, of thinking that we are capable of providing for ourselves, believing God's rich provision for our needs is a reward for our skill and efforts. We even think we can improve of what God has provided and greedily plunder the earth's riches and natural resources without a thought of the consequences of our actions or awareness of those who suffer because of them.

So let us take a moment here in our service to allow God to speak to us as if we are the young man in Mark's parable. We come to Jesus, wanting to follow Him, doing our best to be good disciples. This is God's gift of grace to us and has nothing to do with personal merit. But what does He say to us this morning? Are our lives so loaded with things or concerns that like the camel trying to enter the city through the narrow gate their burden jams against the walls and prevents our progress? It is good to remember that all is God's gift to us. As king Solomon said at the dedication of the Temple, 'All things come from you and of your own do we give you.'

Our discipleship, our ability and desire to share what God gives us with others, is His gift. It is not about what we choose to do for Him, but what we allow Him to do for us. He has done all we need for life in all its abundance here on earth and in the world to come through the Incarnation and the Cross. It is all made real for us by the Holy Spirit. God loves us, God dies for us, God lives in us.

So let us, as Mt ends his version of the story, 'seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness' thank God for His goodness each day and share His gifts with those less fortunate than ourselves. Amen