

This Sermon was prepared by Revd Geoffrey Colman for the Harvest Festival Service which took place at Puy de Serre on 14th October 2012.

Unfortunately, due to sickness, Geoffrey was unable to preach so we are taking this opportunity to publish it in on the All Saints Vendée website:

Puy de Serre
14 October Harvest
Revd Geoffrey Colman
Not preached – on website

If you took a poll amongst all clergy – heaven forbid – I believe you’d find their top Sundays for not preaching would be Remembrance Sunday, Harvest and Trinity – Remembrance because it is so very difficult not to preach the same every year – just pull it out of the file and read – Harvest because you said it all last year, the year before and the rest – Trinity Sunday because you haven’t a clue what the Doctrine of the Trinity is all about

‘We plough the fields and scatter’ – oh no we don’t – there are very few now who plough anything and nobody scatters, unless you use ‘scatter’ to describe tipping a ton of grain into a hopper, towing it behind a tractor and spreading it in dead straight rows for miles at a time – and what happened to gleaning? – Many of us will remember the days when we used to go and glean like mad – you try it now – look at any field where they’ve harvested the grain and bundled up the stalks into five ton rolls – never mind a crumb of wheat, you can’t even find a single remaining stalk - gone are the days of jolly red-cheeked farmers and even jollier ashen-cheeked labourers laughing as they scatter, scythe, reap and bind, stook and thresh – forget ‘one man went to mow, one man and his dog’ – it’s one man and his mighty machines and heaven help any little doggy that gets in the way – nothing very romantic left.

But look around you – marvel at the sheer quantity of harvest that can now be brought in – enabling so many to feed on its abundance – delight in the amazing accuracy of the ploughing and harrowing – leaving beautiful patterns in the changing colours of the soil - dark as to be almost black to chalk white through hundreds of lovely browns – straight lines that stretch for miles – swirls and whorls where the huge multiple-bladed plough has to swing round at the edge of the field - the tiny stalks and empty fields that speak of no waste - the beauty of the rape seed (not to mention that smell of old cats) – the dark and impenetrable forests of maize reaching high in threatening ranks – the woeful hung heads of the dying sunflowers that gave such cheerful delight, smiling with you in their full glory earlier in the year – the mouth-watering promise of rank upon rank of vines untouched by human hand - the clear, sharp green against smooth brown of the first seeds to appear, it seems just a few hours since the fields were harvested.

Yes, indeed, there is as much for which to give thanks now as there ever was when so many people worked the harvest – we are a long way from it all but we must give thanks especially for the inventiveness and skill of the engineers who have designed those monumental and complex machines that enable mankind to bring in enough food for his welfare – ‘Thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love’ – and thank him again and again.

But at harvest time man fails to fulfil God’s promises.

‘Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice, rejoice in the Lord who has given you the early rain and the late rain’ - yes, God sends the rain, but not always and from time to time far too much – ask those who live in the lands that have seen no blessing from the sky for two or three years – ask those whose

carefully nurtured crops are blasted away by guns or stolen by armies – God makes his promise clear – *'you shall eat plenty and be satisfied'* – tell that to the mother who is holding her new-born child and watching him die of hunger – how can we, or those in need, believe in God when he inflicts such terrors on so many while others bask in their riches?

Paul reminds Timothy that *'we brought nothing into this world and we will take nothing out'* – God brought us into this world with nothing and He will call us with nothing – this life, however wonderful or difficult, is a small part of something far greater on which we should never cease to focus – that's why those who search for riches while others die of hunger *'pierce themselves with many prongs'* – because they are chasing *'harmful and senseless desires'* – I often want to weep as I see man pursuing so many dreams that cost so much when, if all that ingenuity, all that brilliance, all that money, all that energy, all that international co-operation, could be directed towards the starving - so much could be achieved – and if people are not starving they have time to think about love and if people think about love then, indeed, *'thy kingdom come'* could be more than a vain hope.

Jesus can say *'take no thought for tomorrow'* - hold up the lilies and the birds as examples for us to follow – only because we are God's hands and feet and only through what we do can God's promises come about – when Jesus says *'seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you'* He is not saying we should live our lives in prayer and holiness and leave everything else for Him to give us – He is saying that seeking the Kingdom of God is loving our neighbour as ourselves – and how can we pretend we are loving our neighbours if they are starving to death?

God has no hands, only our hands – if our heads do not listen to Him and our hands follow what we hear then there will always be people who can only laugh at God's word when He says *'you shall eat plenty and be satisfied'*.

As we rejoice in the thousand images of blessing we see every day – as we thank God for His bounty, so let's also, not instead of, also do everything we can, however little, in a difficult world where the problems of starvation seem so far beyond our reach, to help our neighbours.

Psalm 98 has some most un-British suggestions – wouldn't it be marvellous if we could rejoice like this! - *'Break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with trumpets and the sound of the horn. Make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord. Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the hills sing for joy together.'*

Let our thanksgiving be followed by a blessing to those in need.