

Harvest of talents

27 9 09

Eternal God,
you crown the year with your goodness
and you give the fruits of the earth in their season:
grant that we may use them for your glory
for the relief of those in need
and for our own well-being;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

My text may be found in today's reading from Joel:

'the pastures of the wilderness are green;
the tree bears its fruit,
the fig tree and vine give their full yield
O children of Zion, be glad
And rejoice in the Lord your God:'

(2 v22 & 23)

The Church of King Charles the Martyr, Potters Bar, is a modern building. The need for a church to be built to serve the people now living in the rapidly growing estate of 1930 houses was self-evident and the Royal Martyr Union stumped up

half the cash (about £5,000) and the Diocese of London the balance and so the sixth and latest building to be dedicated to the memory of Charles I, King and Martyr, was started in 1939 before the outbreak of the Second World War and was opened for worship in July 1941. It is built in red brick with a tiled roof in the style of a Jacobean barn. As such, it is a powerful visual symbol of a theological truth: that a church is a barn in which the harvest of God, the people of God, gather together in preparation for the final harvest of souls when the Kingdom of God is finally fully realised.

Harvest Festival is the traditional time to come to church to celebrate the goodness of God in the provision of a successful harvest. In fact, today's text from the prophet Joel is a vision Joel shares with his fellow Jews returning from Exile in Babylon of God's providence in providing them with a homeland which produces a rich and plentiful harvest. In a post agricultural age, with the majority of people moving off the land into cities, we can feel distant from the necessary cycle of growth which provides the food we eat. Buying in a market or supermarket, we can be forgiven for not minding where the food comes from. Indeed, the packaging hermetically seals in the product so that we can ignore what it is and where it comes from. But at least in the rhythm of the Church Year, we have this service as an annual reminder to be grateful to a beneficent God for a world which can sustain and nurture the gift of life that the Lord our God has called into being.

In one important sense, then, Harvest is about the food we eat. There is, however, another important harvest which concerns us as Christians, the harvest

of souls. That is our prime function as a Church: to nurture Christian growth and through our fellowship, to encourage the spread of the light of the gospel of Christ. St Bartholomew's exists not simply as a place in France where English is spoken; it is not simply a comfortable club for ex-pats; it is, in fact, a place where God can be worshipped through the unique revelation of his Son Jesus Christ in the power of the presence of His Holy Spirit.

To grow here as a church, we need to have sound financial basis and I am grateful for the investments of the past and the present financial commitment to the church by those who worship here even in the face of a deep recession which hits all our pockets. To grow here as a church, we also need a commitment of time and talents in order that the work of the church may continue and expand. Many people do so much already to make sure the work of our church thrives but we are all growing older so we do need those who are newer and younger members to start to share and shoulder some of the burden of our work here. There so much to be done: people to act as welcomers and to give out the service books with a smile; people to provide the refreshments after the service to cement our fellowship; people to teach in Sunday school to encourage the young; people to arrange the flowers to beautify our building; people to undertake maintenance jobs to keep the buildings we own in good repair; people to help with the cleaning to make the place in which we worship wholesome. The list is endless and I would ask you to reflect on what you could do to help the congregation here to thrive. The irony is that, if you work hard and we are successful, you will ultimately make yourself redundant as there will be new folk to share and take up the burden.

There is a vision in the gospels of the harvest being ripe but the labourers to gather in that harvest being few. As we move towards the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Britain next year, you too are being called to be one of the few, labouring in God's vineyard. At the end of the day, may we all hear those great words of approbation, - 'Well done good and faithful servant.'

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's Dinard

27th September, 2009

H: Sermon 20: Harvest of talents

