

Harvest 2020

As we come together to celebrate Harvest Festival today, a time of giving thanks to God for his many good gifts to us, I have to admit that, especially when I've been going through challenging times, I haven't always been as aware of God's love and care as I perhaps should, nor have I necessarily been that grateful - especially when being given a celestial kick up the backside, or a banana skin!

At challenging or difficult times, and heaven knows, this year has been both of those for all of us in varying degree, it can be all too easy for us to forget to be thankful. Instead of remembering the way in which God has faithfully fed and cared for us, we can fret and complain about how the Government is handling the Covid crisis, what we have to do today, or what we have to do tomorrow and the restrictions under which we have to live our daily lives.

It is easy to see how people can be grateful when things are going well, but how we can find a way to be thankful when things aren't going so well in our lives?"

In a sermon given by the former Administrator at Walsingham, Fr Philip Barnes, he quoted a writer who said, "I believe our century is lacking in gratitude....the most urgent task is praise". All very good and fine one might say, until you know that this was written by a Czech composer in a concentration camp.

Maybe one way to increase our sense of gratitude on a daily basis might be to revive the good old-fashioned discipline of "counting our blessings": to name all those things we normally take for granted, and to give thanks for them as we set them in a wider context.

For example, without wishing to underestimate the impact which the restrictions Covid has brought on travelling, both in this country and for those wishing to travel abroad, perhaps we need to be reminded of the privilege, and be grateful for the fact that we do have, easy, fast, safe travel, and that one day we will return to normal.

Also, our restrictions on travel need to be set against a bigger backdrop as, once again, we see desperate people trying to move across the world, fleeing from war-zones or natural disasters.

When we see the damage done to formerly beautiful cities such as Aleppo, for example, we can use this as an opportunity to be humbly thankful for things such as being able to flick a switch and get immediate electric light, or to turn on a tap to get instant, safe water for drinking and sanitation.

Harvest is a time when we give thanks for food we eat, and to think about how our food gets to our table; to be thankful for the work of people across the world who have a part to play in enabling it to get to us; and to increase our awareness, and

possible response to, the needs of the poor across the world and, not least, on the Isle of Wight where people are, quite literally, living on the bread-line.

The Ventnor food bank, to who our Harvest gifts will be given, is now being run as a Community Foodbank since its separation from the Trussell Trust. There are families in Upper Ventnor and other parts of the island who are really struggling to feed their children and, especially with the loss of livelihoods and incomes due to Covid, many are in really dire need of all the help they can get.

As someone once said, which seems appropriate here, "Man does not live by bread alone. But he doesn't live long without it either".

At harvest, we are called to remember in our prayers, and in practical ways where possible, those who have little; the peasant farmers in developing countries who struggle to feed their families, the people on the Isle of Wight for whom making ends meet is a daily challenge. We pray, because we believe in a God who stands alongside those who suffer and struggle and who uses people of goodwill, like you and me who, through one random action of kindness at a time, work to build a fairer, kinder world.

As a Christian community, we need gratitude and praise to be at the heart of our lives because, although we are very good at grumbling, the word "Eucharist" means "thanksgiving".

As we come once again to be fed by the bread of angels, let us be thankful for the spiritual food and the blessings it brings, and let us pray that it will bring us to draw us closer to God and our neighbour in faith and hope and love.