

The Curate's Letter



Dear Friends,

October begins as always with our celebration of Harvest Festival. As with many of our festivals, this observance is firmly rooted in ancient pagan tradition. Although the Old Testament prescribes a feast to celebrate the first fruits of the harvest, the church does not appear to have observed any such festivals until relatively recent times. In the Book of Common Prayer no mention is made of Harvest, and it was not until 1796 that the first official prayer of thanksgiving for an abundant harvest was provided. It was about this period that most of the popular harvest hymns were written and it is said that the modern tradition of celebrating Harvest Festival by bringing produce to decorate churches began in 1843, when the Reverend Robert Hawker invited parishioners to a special thanksgiving service at his church at Morwenstow in Cornwall.

In recent times, particularly in communities such as ours where most people are not directly involved with agriculture the nature of Harvest Festival has changed somewhat. An awareness of Global and Environmental issues has highlighted more of the challenges associated with modern farming and agriculture and knowledge of what conditions are like elsewhere has led us to ask questions around world hunger, starvation, food surpluses and international debt. To that end we shall again be collecting for the work of Christian Aid alongside the traditional Harvest collection for distribution within the parish and to the Dacorum Emergency Night Shelter.

A tradition that pre-dates the Harvest Festival service by many hundreds of years is that of the Harvest Supper, traditionally a big meal to which all who had helped in the harvest were invited. It was sometimes known as a "Mell-supper", after the last patch of corn standing in the fields. Cutting it signified the end of the work of harvest and the beginning of the feast. I do hope many of us will be able to join together on the eve of the festival to celebrate the harvest in this way, followed of course by the customary entertainment.

Further into October, we will be re-commencing our Bible Study group, meeting on Monday evenings and Thursday mornings. Many people have expressed interest in this so please see the details within this magazine and come along if you are able. Alongside this, each Sunday in October as we lead up to our celebration of All Saints' at the start of November there will be a series of sermons on Sunday mornings looking at the lives of the Saints, and how their example may be relevant for us today.

With my love and prayers,

Fr. Benjamin.