

Harvest Thanksgiving 2011

Father David I. Giffen

I speak to you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Growing up in the mega-city which is Toronto, I, and most children like me, never had a solid grasp of the significance of what happens at farms and fields throughout our country at this time of year.

It's not that I had never heard of the word 'harvest,' nor was it that I was completely unaware of where food came from, but the meaning of the term 'harvest' for many of the suburban and urban children of my generation, tended to point more to the decorating of dinner tables with Autumn's coloured leaves, and Thanksgiving celebrations with large family feasts.

The meaning of the word 'harvest' rarely offered insight into the planting, nurturing, and harvesting of the crops; it rarely gave many of us a glimpse into the cultivating of the land. I knew we had food in abundance, and I was thankful for a celebratory feast, but the real origins of where it all came from, wasn't as immediate for me as it could have been.

Over the years I have realized that if I am really honest with myself, I still don't have a full grasp and appreciation for the work farmers do to bring our food to our tables – as many in my generation don't – but when you aren't aware of where something comes from, when you don't truly know of the work which it entails, it's not all that hard to imagine forgetting to be grateful, or misunderstanding 'Thanksgiving' as an entitled feast.

Unless you have been absent from Sunday morning liturgies since the end of June this year – *I won't point fingers at anyone here* – but unless you have been absent since June, you will likely have noticed that after having the Baptismal Font present amidst us throughout the Eater Season, our congregation made a significant change to our worship space, so that the Font would remain present with us throughout the entire year.

Since the change was made, I have encountered a number of different reactions. I have been asked quite plainly, “what on earth is it doing there?” and I have been asked quite curiously whether or not that is “a Catholic thing.” I’ve seen some walk by it longingly, pondering memories of their children at that same Font, while others have tiptoed passed it not quite sure yet what they think. I had an incredible encounter just a few weeks ago, when I watched a member of the AA group on Monday night walk up to it, to stand next to it, asking me if there was water inside it to touch.

It has been a good disruption and a great conversation starter in many different ways, and although each has varied, countless wonderful reactions I have heard – but most importantly it has given us the opportunity to engage each other and contemplate the answer to the important question: Why the change?

In the same way that understanding the notion of ‘the harvest,’ answers the question, where does our food come from?
Understanding why the Font should remain present in our liturgy, answers the question, where do we come from?

Before our food ends up on our tables for tonight’s Thanksgiving feast, seeds had to be planted, and water sprinkled on top.
Livestock needed to be cared for, and crops needed to be pruned.

Sweat and labour throughout a summer full of work, with hopes that the seeds which were planted, nurtured and loved, would produce fields full of plenty, and a harvest for us all.

In the same way, before we could come to gather as this community, in this place; before we were formed, and before we were faithful, we found ourselves next to the Font in its place. Whether as children in our parent's arms, or as adults making a statement to the world, each one of us found new birth in our Baptism, through the waters of the Baptismal Font.

Each week, as baptized people you answer God's call to come and to gather at His table – the place where God's creation can be nurtured and sustained anew. Each time we return to hear the word of God, and allow ourselves to be transformed through prayers and thanksgivings – we are then sent out as a missional body, so that we can take God's 'harvest' to share with God's world.

The Font rests at the entrance of many of churches, because upon entering the sacred and celebratory space of worship, we are called to be reminded of where our life began.

As I have shared with you before, when first worshipping at Transfiguration, I wasn't sure what to make of a Font that could be rolled in, and rolled away, as though it was simply a pretty piece of furniture upon the floor; that when there was no baptism for an appointed Sunday, like too many churches, the font would not even be in plain sight, hidden in the back corner – out of the way.

The symbol of our baptism and the waters of new life are as central to who we are as Christians, as hearing the gospel proclaimed, or receiving the Eucharist. Yet Sundays throughout our liturgical year, we have knelt to receive the bread of life, and we have heard the message of God's word, but missing has often been the waters of our origins, missing has been where it all began.

Our society has a tendency to make some pretty big mistakes when it comes to progress and change. Often we simply abandon what and who we have been, because it is no longer who we are.

Just a few years ago now, I remember saying to my mentor at the time, Bishop Terry Dance, that I didn't think a Harvest Thanksgiving celebration made sense for a Church which was filled with so many city folk; that many urban people had never even stepped foot on a farm.

I remember being resolute in my thoughts, and quite certain that we had moved beyond such things. And I remember Bishop Terry looking at me incredulously as though he thought I needed to be given a good shake.

The fact that some of us don't take part in the harvesting each year is actually all the more reason for us to offer thanksgiving – not a reason to leave it behind. It's an opportunity to educate, and to thank God not only for the food He provides, but for those who provide it for us.

It's not an opportunity for us to forget where we came from, but a day to remember who God has made us to be: a farmer gathering crops for the harvest in his field, a grocery clerk stocking shelves full

of food, a mother cutting sandwiches for her children, and volunteers preparing meals for those who go without.

We are a people, who are joined to one other through food, and through shelter and through love, and we offer thanksgiving today for the offering of all God's people, and we shall not forget a single one.

As Christians we should understand even better than most, what it means to be joined to one another. For this Body of Christ of which we are members knows that none of us survives alone; that the ear of the body is not the eye of the body, just as the Priest is not the Farmer. But although the ear should not desire to be the eye, the ear cannot forget the value the eye has to the body as a whole.

The Baptismal Font in our new Baptistery stands today at the entrance of our church, and it stands there because it is at the entranceway to who we are. It is where we became united to one another; it is where we became one body. It serves as our memory of our past, God's call in our present and the promise of our future together. That our God loved us so much that he called us to that water; our God cares for us so much that he invites us to His table, and our God cherishes us so much that he promises us a Kingdom, where none are hungry or forgotten.

We are born through the waters of baptism, and united as the Body of Christ – loved, nurtured, and transformed; we remember both where come from, and who we are.

Thanks be to God.

