

Harvest Thanksgiving Homily

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 the country at this time of year.

It's not that we had never heard of the word 'harvest,' or that we didn't know where food came from, but it's meaning for many of us signified decorating dinner tables with colored leaves for thanksgiving, and large family feasts.

Its meaning rarely offered insight into the planting, nurturing, and harvesting of crops; it rarely gave us a glimpse of the cultivating of the land. We knew we had food in abundance, and a celebratory feast, but the origins of where it all came from, wasn't as immediate to us as it could have been.

Over the years I have realized that I still don't have, a full grasp and appreciation, for the work farmers do to bring our food to our tables – many in my generation don't – for when you aren't aware of where something comes from, or the work which it entailed, your instinct doesn't call for you to be grateful, or even give thanksgiving at the least.

Many of you may have noticed that ever since I baptized young Spencer on our BBQ Sunday in September, the baptismal font has remained at the center of our church.

I have been asked why it is there, and if that's not 'a Catholic thing.' I've seen some walk by it longingly, and others not quite sure what to think. I watched an impoverished man, this week, from our Fellowship Center downstairs, walk up to it, to stand next to it, so that

he might touch the water in his despair. It's been a noticeable disruption to many in different ways, and fair reaction I have heard, for no one has said anything to explain it yet, no one has answered the question, why the change?

In the same way understanding, '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 labor throughout a summer full of work, with hopes, the seeds, which were planted, nurtured and loved, would produce fields full of plenty, and a harvest for the world.

And 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 font.

Each one of you born out of baptism has returned to care for each other. Each week, you, the baptized, are called to the table, to be nurtured and to grow. Each time you return to hear the word of God, and be transformed through prayers and thanksgivings – you leave this place as a missional body, taking *our* harvest to share with the world.

The baptismal font can traditionally be found at the entrance to many Anglican Churches. It stands there as a reminder to all who enter the church, of the death and resurrection Christians were

called to by Christ, plunging into the waters of baptism, and emerging with new life.

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

When I first came to worship at Saint Paul's some four years ago – I was astonished at how the font could be rolled in, and rolled away, as though it was simply a pretty piece of decoration upon the floor. If there was no baptism for an appointed Sunday, the font would not even be in sight, hidden somewhere out of the way.

The symbol of our baptism, and the water of new life, is as central to who we are as Christians, as hearing the gospel proclaimed, or receiving Eucharist. Yet Sundays throughout our liturgical year, we kneel to receive the bread of life, and we hear the message of God's word, but missing is often the water of our origins, missing is where it began.

Too often our society abandons who we have been, because it is no longer who we are. Just last year I remember saying to our former Dean, Bishop Dance that I didn't think a Harvest Thanksgiving celebration made sense for a congregation of so many city folk. I remember being resolute in those thoughts, that we had moved beyond such things. And I remember Bishop Terry looking at me as though I needed to be given a good shake.

The fact that some of us don't take part in the harvesting each year is *more* reason for us to offer thanksgiving, not a reason to leave it behind. It's an opportunity to educate, and to thank god for not only 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 we are; a farmer gathering crops for the harvest in the field, a grocery clerk assembling some food, a mother preparing

meals for her children, and volunteers cutting sandwiches downstairs.

A people conjoined to one other through food, and through shelter and through love. We give thanks for the giving's of all of God's people, not forgetting a single one.

As Christians we should understand even better than most, what it means to be joined to another. 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 font stands today at the center of the cruciform of our church, because it is at the center of who we are. It is where we became united to one another; it is where we became one body. It serves as memory of our past, God's call in our present and the promise of our future. That our God loved us so much he called us to the water, He cares for us so much he invites us to his table, and he cherishes us so much he promises a Kingdom, where none are hungry or forgotten.

Born through the waters of baptism, and united in the Body Christ – loved, nurtured, and transformed, remembering who we are.

Thanks be to God.