

## **Sunday 24th September 2017 (Harvest)**

**St Faith, Havant**

**8.00am – Mass & 9.30am – Parish Mass**

*Deuteronomy 8.7-18; 2 Corinthians 9.6-end; St Luke 12.16-30*

I currently have one hundred tins of baked beans. Is that too many?

If it's *me*, and I've done the weekly grocery shop for my family, and I've bought one hundred tins of beans, then *yes*, that is definitely too many. Four of us do not *need* that many beans.

If I were the co-ordinator of the local foodbank, then one hundred tins of beans is probably about right, for now. There will be plenty of hungry people needing them. They will be put to good use.

If I were the distribution manager for Heinz, then one hundred tins of beans is nowhere near enough. There are thousands of shops all over the country which need more beans, so I'm probably now going to lose my job.

Whether one hundred tins of baked beans is too many depends on why you need beans, and what you're planning on doing with them. One hundred tins of beans is fine if you're giving them to other people, but it's too many for me personally, because it's far more than I need.

The error of the rich man in Our Lord's parable was not in the abundant production of his land. Indeed, as we heard in our

first reading, God's promise to his people is of a land in which there is no scarcity and no lack of produce. Abundant harvests are a gift from God. Nor, when confronted with this great abundance, was the rich man's error in building larger barns – for the proper stewardship of God's bounty, whatever form that takes, is part of the responsibility of all his people, and in the case of crops that means sufficient barns and storage.

The error...no. Let us call it what it is. The *sin* of the rich man is in hoarding this abundant harvest for his own selfish ends. He does not need to store up goods for many years to come, for there will be another harvest next year, and the year after, and every year that he lives. He is the lucky farmer who has grown the crops and reaped the abundant harvest, but there will be many people to feed over the winter months, and his true and proper stewardship of God's bounty would be to keep only what he and his household need for that expected lean period, and to allow the rest to be sold – or perhaps even better still, since he was already rich, given away to those who will otherwise have nothing. Instead, he selfishly keeps it all for his long future; a future which, it turns out, he does not have. Crops, money, buildings, books, artwork...whatever your earthly treasure, you really cannot take it with you.

Harvest festival is a time to give thanks. It's a time to say thank you for the produce of air, land, and sea; to say thank you for the skill, commitment, and hard work of the people who tend it and harvest it, who store it, package it, and distribute it. Above all it is a time to give thanks to God. To give thanks that he is ever faithful to his promise of abundant production, his promise that his faithful people will not suffer lack or face scarcity. To give thanks that he has created air, land, and sea, and the produce they bring forth; and that he has created women and men and given them gifts and talents to harness and harvest that bountiful productivity. In giving thanks to God for all these things, we acknowledge that he is the ultimate source from whom all good things come. And when we acknowledge that, we are thereby forced to acknowledge that this harvest is not our own. No. As the Psalmist says, "The earth is the *Lord's* and *all* that is in it". This produce, this harvest, like every harvest, is not ours. It is God's. Yes, we should keep what we need for the time that it is needed, for that is proper Christian stewardship of God's bounty, and that is God's gift to us. But to keep more than that is to deny God's gifts to other people.

Despite God's faithfulness to his promise that there would be no lack and no scarcity, we know all too well that there are many people throughout this world who suffer as a result of lack and scarcity. There are people here in this town, today, who will go hungry and thirsty because of lack and scarcity. Has God then

broken his promise? No. God does not break his promises. Rather, so many people go without because so many other people fall into the same sin as the rich man of the parable. Far too many people hoard far more than they actually need, and the inevitable result is that other people end up going without. If I go and buy one hundred tins of beans simply because I can, then nobody else can have them, and so somebody will have to go without. God's abundance is there, but the selfish sin is mine; and it is my sin which prevents there being enough for all.

So this morning, there is something else to give thanks for. This morning, I give thanks for all of you who have donated food for our foodbank, and for all of you who do so throughout the year. This morning, I care not for political arguments about whether we should need foodbanks at all. Those arguments can be left for another day. This morning, I care only that we recognise that the bounty of harvest is God's, that it is his gift to us to steward wisely and properly, and that we make the effort to avoid the sin of selfishness. I give thanks to God for you, and I thank you on behalf of all those people who will not go hungry and thirsty this week because you have chosen to reflect something of God's abundant generosity in your own generosity.

So as today we give thanks to God for another harvest, let us strive to carry that thankfulness into our everyday lives – and with thankfulness, the acknowledgement that everything we have

is ultimately only a gift from God, and that it is not ours to hoard in our own sinful selfishness. Let us be faithful stewards and keep what we need; and then let us be generous to others as God is so abundantly generous to us. God will always keep his promise that there will be plenty, and not scarcity; that there will be abundance, and not lack: but it is our responsibility as the people of God to do our part in making sure that everybody, everywhere sees that promise fulfilled. That is God's challenge to us every day; and this morning, we have made a good start. For that, and for all his gifts of the harvest, let us bless the Lord our God.