

Reflection for 11th October 2026 – Harvest Festival

It's difficult to celebrate Harvest in a country where most of us aren't involved in gathering the harvest in – even if we're dimly aware when driving through the countryside, of combine harvesters in the fields filling the air with dust. So we have turned the celebration of Harvest into other things – a thanksgiving for *all* the plenty we enjoy, and a reminder of our duty to remember and reach out to those who, at a symbolic time of plenty, have nothing. These are all good things to remember, of course. But the dislocation of Harvest Festival from the actual harvest has perhaps obscured one very important aspect of this celebration that is very much to the fore in today's Gospel reading: that the harvest is not a certainty. It is based on trust, and it is based on hope.

THE HOPE OF HARVEST

The past few years have shaken our certainty in the reliability of the complex supply chains that put food on our supermarket shelves, which most of us rely on. Although we are certainly shielded to a greater extent than previous generations from the uncertainty that attended the harvest, it has by no means gone. War, climate change and disease still threaten the harvest, affecting the availability and price of food – and, of course, hitting the poorest and most vulnerable the hardest. So, the concerns of those who listened to Jesus' Parable of the Rich Fool are not as far from ours as we might think. When they sowed a crop, they had no guarantee there would be anything to harvest; and even when they prepared to gather the harvest in, they must have lain awake worrying about a last-minute attack by locusts or a last-minute storm that spoiled the entire crop. They were forced to rely on hope. These days there are few of us who grow the crops ourselves; but the anxieties are the same, even if we project them to the level of cost and supply. Will I be able to afford to feed my family? Will the supply chains hold? Will there be food on the shelves?

CONQUERING WORRY

If the harvest is a source of anxiety, then and now, the successful gathering in of the harvest was and is a cause for celebration: celebration, and relief that we're all sorted for the winter. The sting in the tail of Jesus' parable, however, is that *even then* – when he has seemingly avoided the hazards of blight, locusts and storm – life is still uncertain. Barns packed with grains to the rafters don't protect you from death. On the face of it, the parable has a certain cruelty; why taunt people in an agrarian society, already worried about the harvest, with even more uncertainty? Jesus' point in doing this, I would suggest, is that we overcome worry not by avoiding it, but by confronting the true depth of life's uncertainty. Jesus' words in verses 22-28, where he reminds his hearers that God feeds the ravens and clothes the flowers, are sometimes spun as a facile message: 'Don't worry, be happy', as the song has it. Of course, life isn't so simple; we know that none of us can simply choose to stop worrying, never mind the damaging implications to mental health that such an attitude carries. But that isn't what Jesus is saying. He doesn't say we can wish worry or anxiety away. But he does say that we can overcome it; that the power of worry to control our lives doesn't have the last word.

RICH TOWARDS GOD

The phrase that Jesus uses to describe the one who has overcome worry is one whose meaning isn't immediately obvious. Such a person will be 'rich towards God'. Since he has just told a parable about a foolish rich man who put his faith in barns packed with grain, Jesus seems to be speaking here about adopting a similar attitude towards the things of God. Imagine if we accumulated the things of God as greedily as we hoard possessions: the gifts of the Spirit, an overflowing love of God, and of neighbour. Imagine if this was our harvest. This is the harvest we don't need to worry about, because no-one can destroy or take it from us. When our hearts are set on this harvest, worry ought to recede into the background; not because we are disconnected from reality or deluding ourselves about the world's problems, or the depth of need – but because God is a reality so much greater than the things of this world.

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