

HARVEST THANKSGIVING

Believing that in a predominantly urban and industrial society it is necessary for people to be reminded that the source of continuing life is not money but food and that food does not originate in shops but in seedtime and harvest, I regard harvest thanksgiving as an essential component in the yearly cycle of worship. It should be more than 'cosmetic' - the decoration of the building with flowers and fruit, though that is not to be decried. The harvest service should comprise the dedication of a significantly generous offering of food-stuffs for the needy of parish or locality; and/or a money offering for a starving Third World. (Might not Christian Aid Week have been appropriately at harvest-tide?) It should also entail a self-rededication to Christ the Living Bread at this climax of the natural year. Thus, such a harvest service should, I believe, culminate in a celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion.

I devised the following ceremonial (an enactment of the ritual of offering of first-fruits in Deuteronomy chapter 26) as the commencement of such a service. It was first introduced in St Paul's Parish Church, Leith in 1953 and was continued there and in St Paul's (now Finnart-St Paul's) Greenock until my retirement in 1977. One of my former assistants, the Very Rev Dr Jack Dalziel, introduced it to his charge in the Presbyterian Church of South Africa and I understand it was later incorporated in some service book of that Church.

CALL TO WORSHIP: The Lord is faithful in all his words and gracious in all his deeds. The eyes of all look unto thee, O Lord, and thou givest them their food in due season. Thou openest thy hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. O come let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.

A HYMN OR PSALM IS ANNOUNCED: During its singing the choir enters down the aisle and takes its place; followed by the beadle bearing the Bible which he places, open to the people, on the Communion Table; followed by the elders bearing the communion elements which they place on the Table; followed by one elder (it was customarily the Session Clerk or senior elder) bearing a large dish or basket of harvest fruits. He halts at the foot of the chancel steps and, the hymn being ended, says:

We profess this day unto the Lord our God that we are dwellers in the land which the Lord our God gave to our fathers.

The minister (at the top of the steps) responds:

The Lord brought us forth with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with terribleness and signs and wonders. And he has brought us to this place and has given us this land, even a land flowing with milk and honey.

The elder advances, raising the offering, and says:

And now, behold, we have brought the fruits of the land which you, O Lord, have given us.

He hands the offering to the minister who takes it and lays it on a low shelf placed in front of the Communion Table (Deut 26, 4). Returning to his original place, he says:

Hear, O people of God, the Lord our God is one God: and you shall love the Lord our God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might; and your neighbour as yourself. You shall fear the Lord our God and serve him.
(Choir and people respond by saying or singing 'Amen' .)

This is God's law of the harvest. When you reap the harvest of your land you shall not reap to its very border, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave these for the poor and the foreigner.

(The people respond, 'Amen' .)

Our Lord Jesus said: "I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; naked and you clothed me. For inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me."

(The people respond singing "Praise God from whom all blessings flow...")

A hymn is sung during which the special money offering for the world's deprived is made. The service then continues in the usual form and order.

In the Eucharist I feel some special emphasis should be laid on the sacrament being the Bread of Life - the spiritual sustenance essential for true living. The following has been used by me many times over the years and is here offered as a suggestion.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. ('Amen')

According to the institution, example and command of our Lord Jesus Christ we do this.

Jesus Christ, feeding the multitude, said: I am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eat this bread he shall live for ever.

Jesus Christ, betrayed and about to die, said: This bread is my body given for you. Eat this to recall me to you.

Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, took bread and fish and gave to his disciples, saying: Come and eat. If you love me, feed my sheep.

Prayer: We praise you, O God: we acknowledge you to be the Lord.

All the earth doth worship you, the Father everlasting.

You are the king of glory, O Christ; the everlasting Son of the Father.

When you had overcome the sharpness of death, you opened the kingdom
of heaven to all believers.

Therefore, with all the company of heaven, we worship and adore you;
evermore praising you and saying,

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts;

Heaven and earth are full of your glory;

Glory be to you, O Lord most high.

Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

We pray you, Father, in the name of Christ, come in the Holy Spirit and
bless us and these your gifts of bread and wine: that they may be to us
the communion of your body and blood.

And here, in all sincerity, we offer ourselves, whole and entire, to be a
living sacrifice to you in the service of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Our Father.....

The Delivery, Communion and Post-Communion follow, and the worship ends with the blessing
of the people.

David R Easton

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BARTH (Gerhard) Die Taufe in frühchristlicher Zeit. Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener
Verlag 1981.
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The CLOUD of witnesses: a companion to the lesser festivals and holydays of the
Alternative Service Book 1980. Comp. by Martin Draper. London, 1982. (Publ. for
the Alcuin Club.) £3.95.

CHRIGHTON (James D.) The liturgy of Holy Week. Rev., enl. ed. Dublin, Fowler Wright, 1983
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Prayer. (Alcuin Club Collections, 65.) London, 1983. £8.50

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introduction to the study of Christian worship). Edinburgh, T & T Clark. 1983 £5.95

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