

When the man was all cleaned up and bandaged, Mother Teresa said to her novices. "If I didn't believe with all my heart and soul this man's body is the body of Christ, I couldn't bear such an abomination for one second."

After ministering to one of the destitute, one so repulsive that normal people could not bear to look, let alone smell such a person, Mother Teresa would take the novices hand, palm held out, and one by one she folded the novice's fingers and thumb back into the palm and said the five words "You did it to me."

I read a story which said that an angel once whispered to a good woman in the morning, that her Lord was coming to her house that day. She made ready for him with loving care, and eagerly watched all day for his coming. At twilight a poor child came to her door and begged shelter for the night, but the woman was thinking so much of her Lord that she only gave the child a little money and sent him on into the darkness. But as he turned away, the child grew fair and beautiful, and as he vanished in a flood of glory, the good woman heard the words, "Behold your Lord!" The Lord had come, and had not been recognised.

The lesson is I think intensely practical because it touches each of our daily lives in the way that we live, and buy and share.

For if we neglect one of Christ's own, one for whom he died, we shall hear on judgment day, "I was hungry and you gave me no bread. I was cold and you clothed me not. I was a homeless stranger at your door and you showed me no pity."

Today's homily isn't meant to make us feel guilty, at least that's wasn't my intention, but it is meant to help us reflect on all that we have been given and to challenge us in the way we treat each other, and the world in which we live for as Christians we have an obligation to act in a way that promotes justice, and to treat others with the same degree of honour that we would treat the Lord of glory himself.

Of course, we can't all be mother Theresa, we can't all run soup kitchens and minister to the needs of the homeless, but we can all be mindful of what we do with what we have. We can all be generous to God with what he has given to us, and we can all pray that we will in some way be used to help those we pray for.

**"For whatever we do to the least of these, we do unto the Lord"  
Amen.**

Harvest 2019 St Mary's with St James

**"Whatever you do to the least of these, you do it for me" Fr. Grant Cohen**

**Philippians 4:4-9 / Matthew 25:36-45**

One day Bill went out hunting in the woods. It had been a slow day and he hadn't found any game to shoot. Suddenly, he heard a noise behind him. He spun around to see two ferocious looking bears coming towards him. Quickly he raised his rifle to his shoulder, took aim and pulled the trigger.

...Nothing happened, the rifle had misfired.

He reloaded and fired again but, nothing, the gun just wasn't working.

By this time, the bears were almost on top of him. In desperation, he threw down his rifle and ran, but the faster he ran, the closer the bears got. Finally, Bill came to the edge of a cliff, but as there was nowhere to go, he dropped to his knees and began to pray. "O Lord, I pray that you make these bears Christian bears."

As Bill looked up, he was surprised to see the bears kneeling just a few feet away from him. And as he listened, he heard one bear pray;

"For what we are about to receive, may the Good Lord make us truly thankful. Amen."

Harvest Festival is a time when we give thanks to God for his goodness to us. But is it just a time to be thankful for our wealth.

We live in a society where we have so much that at times we take it for granted.

In our first reading from Deuteronomy, we heard how the Israelites were treated harshly in Egypt, enduring hard labour, affliction and oppression.

But I doubt anyone of us have known what it was like to be one of them...

But I do expect that all of us have known difficult times in our lives, times when we have cried out to the Lord to rescue us, to deliver us and to in some way change the situation that's causing us distress. And I imagine that many of us will have stories which would reflect how God has heard and answered our prayer...

You will have heard me talk of Corrie Ten Boom whose family rescued Jews during the second world war, she once said,

"We never know how God will answer our prayers, but we can expect that He will get us involved in His plan for the answer. If we are true intercessors, we must be ready to take part in God's work on behalf of the people for whom we pray."

St. Francis reportedly said, "Preach Jesus, and if necessary, use words."

I expect like me when you go around the supermarket and you buy your weekly shop, you pay little thought as to where it's come from, or who has grown it, the process it's taken to get it onto the shelves and how much those who have grown and picked it have received...

No, like me you probably grumble from time to time how much things have gone up.

As I was reflecting on what to share today, I took a look in my fridge and cupboards. My mushrooms came from the Netherlands, my apples from S. Africa, the grapes from Spain, the tomatoes from Israel, my lettuce from Poland, the tin of tuna from Ecuador, and the bag of sugar from the west indies.

Tea, coffee, chocolate, bananas none of which were produced here and yet I, like you have the ability to consume as much of them as I choose...but 80% of all our food is imported.

But did you know that Coffee pickers earn just 2 dollars a day.

That the average farmer who grows cacao to make our mars bars makes only \$2000 a year

That tea pickers in Sri Lanka earn \$5 a day

And that the people, more often than not, children who make Primark clothes earn just 60p a day.

Globally, about 250 million children are child labourers, 73 million of them under 10 years old.

The plastic we produce each year weighs more than every human being on the planet and 8 million tonnes of it ends up in our oceans killing whales, turtles dolphins and birds.

When we grumble about the rising cost of food, or that our clothes are becoming more expensive, I wonder if we ever consider where the things that we enjoy have come from, and the cost our wardrobes, fridges and store cupboards are to somebody, because our wealth often means someone else's poverty, and our waste somethings else's life....

You're probably wishing you'd stayed in bed, because you were hoping for a more joyful sermon on this harvest Sunday...

It's not that I want to sow doom and gloom this morning, but as we give thanks to God for all that he's given to us, surely it's important for us to remember that it didn't just fall out heaven...that an angel didn't like Rumpelstiltskin make our clothes or grow our food and put them on the shelves of Waitrose.

The reality is that those who grew it and made it probably couldn't afford to buy it.

When I was a curate I started a food bank, the PCC said there weren't any poor people in sale, the Trussell Trust said that we could only give 3 food vouchers in a year, but how do you turn away a mother who doesn't send her children to school because she's only got crisps in the cupboard to feed them?

How do you turn away a group of men who fought for their country but now live on the streets?

How do you turn away an elderly woman who has to choose between having the fire on and feeding herself...? I meet people like this all the time...

In Mathew's gospel we read a very challenging text;

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Our reading from Philippians challenges us to live a life that is worthy of our calling, to be gentle, to be prayerful, to do what is honourable, to live a life of purity, and to treat people and the earth justly...

It's a tall order, and yet it's the calling of all who would follow Jesus.

Mother Teresa's missionaries of charity continued to grow during her life-time, and at the time of her death, it had 610 missions in 123 countries. Hospices and homes for people living with aids and leprosy, soup kitchens, orphanages, and schools. All because one day Mother Teresa heard the voice of God say to her, go and live with the poor and so obeyed.

In Calcutta at that time there were hundreds of people just lying in the streets left to die, and nobody cared. But she did, for she described them as Jesus in disguise.

How different the world would look if we saw everyone we met as Jesus in disguise.

It's said that few of the people got well from the love and care that was offered to them and that most of them died, but the incredible thing about what Mother Theresa did was to offer these people a safe place, a place where they were able to die with dignity and in a place where they were able to feel a human touch and know that someone really cared about them.

One particular story which I think is really powerful is of a man that was brought in off the street.

One of his limbs was being eaten by maggots and the sight was disgusting beyond endurance. Mother Teresa said that even she felt faint as she pulled the wiggling white larvae loose, where the stench she said was nauseating.

But she reminded herself that helping this man was like helping Jesus.