

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

21st October 2020

My diary told me that 21st September was the first day of Autumn but the leaves were hardly changing colour and were still firmly on the trees. Although there was a slight change in the air some mornings and the evenings were starting to draw in, it felt too soon then to reflect on what John Keats called 'the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness' in his 'Ode to Autumn'. Keats wrote the poem in September 1819 and even allowing for a bit of poetic licence I still found myself reflecting on how the timing of our seasons seems to have changed and wondering about the effect our human behaviour is having on our climate. Driving home from Marlborough last week after walking with a friend in Savernake Forest the light of the setting sun on the golden and orange leaves of the trees made it clear that autumn had now definitely arrived. We can see around us the bounty of nature that Keats celebrated in lines such as 'to bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees, And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core; to swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells With sweet kernel.' The squirrels have certainly been busy digging up our lawn to hide their hazel treasure! My friend and I picked up sweet chestnuts in the forest and I brought them home to roast on the fire. Jam and jelly making have been underway for some time. As I write acorns are clattering on the roof and I can hear Stuart raking up leaves outside.

Autumn comes round year after year. Some of us love its richness: the wonderful colours; the conkers and the berries; perhaps scuffling through fallenleaves. Others dread the chillier days and darker evenings. Some of us like the thought of settling down by the fire; others fear loneliness and isolation. This year we are probably all feeling a degree of apprehension - what will a 'Covid winter' be like? Whatever your particular feelings perhaps you'd like to gather together a few leaves, berries, acorns - whatever is around - and while looking at them offer the feelings autumn arouses in you to God.



The pattern of our lives mirrors the rhythm of the seasons and it is worth remembering that we don't just move from spring to winter once in them. There are all sorts of summer and winter times; spring and autumn times; and like the actual seasons they come round again and again but their length may be even more unpredictable than the natural seasons. As you think about autumn you might like to think about times of particular richness and fruitfulness in your own life and celebrate them. But autumn is also the time when the trees shed their leaves so that new ones can come. Sometimes we too need to shed things, to let go in order to move forwards. Maybe we could use this time to do a bit of autumn cleaning.

The gardeners among us may be thinking of 'putting the garden to bed' for the winter, making sure things are tidy and secure. But as we close things down, many of us are also planting bulbs in anticipation of spring and next summer. Something is going to be happening beneath the surface through the winter months even though we can't see it. That is so often true when we

might think nothing much is happening in our spiritual lives. Perhaps as we move through autumn towards winter we might try to see it as a time of preparation; a time when we settle down to wait patiently; a time not to despair but to trust and to hope. After all, we are people living in the light of the Resurrection.

Prayer for Autumn

Lord of the seasons,
there is a time for dying
and a time for new birth;
a time to speak
and a time to keep quiet.
Help us to discern your will for us now.

Lord of autumn leaves and warm berries,
help us to let go gracefully
and to rejoice in the colour and fruitfulness of this moment.
Wrap us in the shawl of eternity
and teach us to await with wonder
the new shoots of your love.



Mary Hanrahan

(in Acorns and Archangels published by Wild Goose Publications)

With my love and prayers

Camilla

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