

This is the first year, since I have been here, that I have been tempted to change the words of the hymn *Come you thankful people come...all is safely gathered in*, because at the time of Marholm's Harvest Festival, a lot of the wheat was as yet not safely gathered in and much else beside. It has been a struggle with machines bogging in and the crop too wet and the rain continuous. As I write this it is looking more promising, but it has been and still is a struggle, and what the implications are for farmers I do not know. Every year the number of people working in farms and on the land continues to go down. And yet the quantity of food produced for sale is just staggering. Apparently when you ask immigrants what they most notice about the UK, it is not freedom, this that or the other. It is the amount of food stacked on the super market shelves and loaded into the trolleys. I was listening to a dietary scientist a nutritionist I suppose I should call him, talking on the wireless. He was visiting hotels and restaurants to see what people were eating. The thing that most astonished him was the size of the enormous portions. In fact he said the more you pay, the less you get and the better it is for you, for the food is much more nutritious and there is rightly less of it – so doubly good for our overweight nation.

For most people in this country the food budget is a small part of their total, but many millions in the world, the only things that matter are food and shelter. I have mentioned before some statistics which if true are appalling – the swill from London restaurants is enough to feed the starving in the whole of Africa, or something.

Increasingly at last much of the food now sold in our supermarkets is British again, as people decide they are concerned for animal welfare and the nature of what they digest. That is one change, but much else may change in the future. There is the technology eg GM crops, and the demand, and the climate are but some factors. It seems likely that our farmers are going to be required again to grow more food. In years past, if the harvest failed the mob in London rioted at the price of bread, or people even starved. But what can I, a priest, say about the harvest this year, with what was potentially a good harvest degraded by poor weather. Well I think I want to say two things, Firstly, in this land anyway, we give thanks to God that we are still fed with plenty; for most people in this land a failed harvest, were it to happen, would just pass unnoticed. Secondly we should continue to pray for those that still labour at the harvest, our farmers and those who work in the land, dealing with a changing climate and changing demands. We ask God's blessing on them in their work – As we give thanks, so also we ask for a blessing on them in their granaries, in their labours, their cattle and the fruit of the ground; at their coming and their going out. William