

In the Celtic Tradition, harvest, which we celebrate today, was celebrated much earlier than is typical these days. Like many ancient cultures, including the Israelites in the OT, they celebrated the start of the Harvest, not the end; in Biblical terms it was called first fruits. As with many Celtic traditions, the early Celtic Christians incorporated the older ways into their Christian Church. The pre-Christian harvest was called Lughnasadh (LOO-nah-sah) or Gwl Awst, the August Feast, and celebrated the pagan god Lugh, also known in Welsh as [Lleu Llaw Gyffes](#) (Lleu of the Skillful Hand) and in Irish [Lugh Lámhfhada](#) (Lugh of the Long Arm). The Christians renamed the festival as Lammas, the Loaf Mass; festivities and rituals typically centered around the assurance of a bountiful harvest season and the celebration of the harvest cycle. In Medieval times the Christian church celebrated Lughnasadh / Lammas wholeheartedly, making it the day on which the fields were blessed in order to ensure a fruitful year.

This was ideal in an agrarian society, a state of existence that continued in Western Europe and North America right up until the mid-19th century, when the number of people employed in farming dropped below 50%. But even in the mid 20th century, there was enough agriculture around that most people lived close enough to farmland that an agricultural harvest was a meaningful part of their lives. Nowadays, I wonder how many children have visited a farm and interacted with farm animals other than, maybe, in a petting zoo.

It may be a consequence of getting older (notice, I don't say old, yet) but I find my thoughts going back to my childhood more and more often. Being taken by my grandmother to feed the goats in a nearby field, or visiting family who had a farm in Somerset. And this week, I've been thinking about Harvest Festival in the Church I attended where I grew up in Wales. We all came together to decorate the Church, with items that reflected the bounty of our area. There were, of course, the fruits of our agricultural heritage, which were rarely purchased from the stores for harvest, but came mainly from our gardens. And flowers – some from our gardens augmented by copious bunches of Michaelmas Daisies and Golden Rod that we had harvested from fields and roadsides. But we were not only part of the agricultural scene, we were also situated between the coal mines of the Welsh valleys and the sea. So we had to have a few lumps of coal as part of our display, and (thankfully) tins of sardines or salmon, not fresh fish. As well as the traditional Harvest songs, we always sang the Manx Fishermen's hymn to be thankful for those who "like men of old ... plough the deep".

This got me thinking. What is there in our lives today that we are thankful to "harvest"? Yes, we are in the midst of an agricultural community here in Lowville, and some of us have gardens where we grow our own produce. But many of us toil (or have toiled) in urban communities. I worked in Toronto at King and Bay; I live in a high rise in Burlington. What should we add to the harvest display? I have a just a few items here which symbolize key harvests in my life, and I'll put them with these lovely flowers:

- A supermarket receipt, because that is where I get most of my food
- An apple from Canada and an orange from overseas to represent the harvest worldwide
- A bag of coffee to symbolize the people who grow our food in far off countries
- A scarf I knitted to represent the work of my hands
- A couple of photographs that remind me of the love I receive from my family.
- And finally ... One of the handful of tomatoes I got from my single tomato plant on my balcony

As I put them here, I ask you to think about what harvests you are thankful for in your lives and to ask yourselves how you can honour them and devote them to serving God.