

Wine harvest blessing



Introduction

In many Old World wine growing countries, it is an established practice going back many centuries for wineries and vineyards to host a Blessing of the Vines or Blessing of the Harvest Festival. Today, clergy overseas are still actively invited to bestow a blessing for healthy vines and a fruitful harvest and offer thanks for another productive season.



Background

We know that by the fourth century vineyards attached to monastic institutions were prevalent, and it seems certain that harvest blessings were in force as early as then. Much of these early harvests was dedicated to communion at the Eucharist celebrations, both for the monks and the local populace.

In the 10th Century, French monks, who were also experienced in viticulture, arrived with William the Conqueror, further strengthening the theological underpinning for harvest blessings, particularly within Monastic vineyards along the coastal areas of the South East as recorded in the Domesday book.

As somebody working for the UK wine trade and as an ordained priest in the Church of England, I have been excited at the possibilities of reviving this custom within the Guildford Diocese, not least because it would seem to fit with the ethos and heritage of wine production. As Gisela Kreglinger states in her book *The Spirituality of Wine*:



‘The Viticulturist has a unique vocation to reveal in one small glass the beauty hidden in creation. For, when crafted well, wine is like “bottled poetry” as Robert Louis Stevenson described it; poetry that praises the bounties of Divine goodness and can stir our souls in wonder and gratitude.’



Wearing my business marketing hat within the wine trade, I could also see how such an event would offer estates a cost-free newsworthy item for website publicity, blogs and the local community press.

With the approval of the Bishop of Guildford, and together with clergy colleagues I have drawn up a short contemporary liturgical service of blessing, both for a fruitful harvest and for the safety and well-being of those working amongst the vines.

How a harvest blessing might work

This can be as simple as short visit by myself and your local vicar to perform the blessing (10-15 minutes), at a time of your choosing. Alternatively, a brief ceremony of blessing could be incorporated into vineyard tour, with the opportunity to build local community links by inviting members of local churches and dignitaries to attend?

The Guildford Diocese has an active publicity department with news circulation across its 218 churches and would be happy to consider publicising the event with details of the vineyard in their regular news bulletins.



For the theologically minded!

Amazingly, there are some 979 separate references to wine in the Bible! Wine seen as special gift from God. Given to comfort us in times of distress (Proverbs 31: 6-7) and to bring joy and gladdens to the human heart (Psalm 104:35).

With its close association to community living, wine in Deuteronomy becomes a technical term for God's covenant blessing promised to Israel and abundance of wine goes on to take on the eschatological imagery of blessing (Joel 3:18, Isaiah 25:6); while the Psalms (4:7) and Ecclesiastes (9:7) inform Jesus' Passover pledge (Luke 22:18) not to partake of the vine again until God's kingdom is realized.

Again grapes lend themselves to an apocalyptic vision of divine blessing at the coming age (Amos 9:13) and also judgment (Revelation 14:18 - 20). The success or failure of a crop often linked to the obedience of God's people (Isaiah 18:5, Micah 6:15, Luke 6:44).

The classic parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5: 1-2 and 5-7 describing God's election of Israel and passages in the Psalms, notably Psalm 80, are powerful images of God's dealings with his elect, serving as a frequent reference for the Prophets (e.g. Hosea 2:12, Amos 4:10). The fertile vineyard imagines acts of restoration and blessing (Amos 9:14), as well as security and peace (1 Kings 4:25). Song of Solomon which is redolent with pleasing vine-like metaphors, then takes the whole usage to new poetic heights.

The gospel parables widen our understanding of the term 'vineyard' to encompass the kingdom of God, climaxing in Jesus' proclamation in John 15:5 that he is true vine and we are the branches, called to bear much fruit.

Climatically, the drinking of the 'fruits of the vine' at the last Supper seals our understanding of the potency attached to wine imagery and adds theological weight to the practice of blessing wine harvests.

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