The Medieval Year - August  
Presented by Diarmaid O’Dunn (Marc Carlson)

August is the end of the hay harvest and the beginning of the grain harvest, as well as for preparing stock fish for Lent. Whole communities gathered together to do the harvest tasks of cutting the grain from the stalks of straw (which would be cut later), binding it into sheaves, stacking it and carting it inside for storage. This is the time that you recognize a change in the length of day. The ripening grain heralds the coming of Autumn. As people get together, they have fairs, picnics and parties. Because of this gathering together, August and September were also often bad months for plague transmission.

Tusser, Thomas. Five hundreth pointes of good husbandrie, 1586.

“Now strike up drum, come harvest-man, come.  
Reap corn by the day, lest corn do decay.  
In champion country a pleasure they take  
To mow up there haulm, for to brew and to bake,  
The haulm is the straw of the wheat and the rye.

“Get home with the brake, to brew with and bake;  
To cover the shed, dry over the bed;  
To lie under cow, to rot under mow;  
To serve to burn, for many a turn.

“Once harvest dispatched, get wenches and boys;  
Choice seed to be picked, and trimly well fy’d.  
When harvest is ended, take shipping or ride;  
Ling, salt-fish, and herring, for Lent to provide.

“To buy it at first, as cometh to road,  
Shall pay for they charges, thou spendest abroad.  
At Bartlenew tide, or at Strurbridge fair;  
Sell to thy profit, both butter and cheese.

“Chuse carefully salt-fish, not burnt at the stove  
Buy such as be good, or else let it alone:  
Get home that is bought, and go stack it up dry,  
With pease-straw between it, the safer to lie.

“In harvest time, harvest folke, servants and all.  
Should make all togither good cheere in the hall;  
And fill out the black boule of bleith to their song  
And let them be merie all harvest time long.

“Once ended they harvest, let none be begilde,  
Please such as did helpe thee, man, woman and childe.
Thus dooing, with alway such helpe as they can,
Thou winnest the praise of the labouring man.”

Some of the more interesting saints’ days include:

Ad vincula Sancti Petri apostolic (*The Chains of Peter the Apostle*), also known as Loafmass, or Lammas (the 1st), which is all about the getting together for the harvest. The first day of Autumn (7th although some calendars have this as the 11th) *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary* (15th) St. Bernard’s Day (20th) St. Bartholemew’s Day (24th) The Beheading of John the Baptist (29th)