

The Gospel of Remembering (Part 1)

22nd After Pentecost; Remembrance Day; November 10, 2019

Every now and then, we run out of milk, and I drink my coffee black. And all it takes is one sip of that black coffee for something amazing to happen.

Immediately, I remember my grandfather, who never kept milk in the house. So when I visited him on Saturday mornings, we drank black coffee together. And he would talk, and I would listen. And I would talk, and he would listen.

He was an Irish immigrant, orphaned at an early age, a veteran of both the first and the second world wars, and a former alcoholic with many years of cherished sobriety. So, he had a lot of stories to tell. And they all seemed to have a similar "moral" -- something to do with serenity or courage or wisdom, even in defeat. He wasn't an educated man, but he was wise in how he lived his life. And all I have to do is take a sip of black coffee..... **and I'm there** -- back with him in his little kitchen; I can smell the wonderful greasy breakfast he's making for us; and hear his voice; and feel the warmth & security & fun of being with him. The whole story "comes alive" in my mind.

It's not so much the black coffee that amazes me -- that's just a "trigger." What's so amazing to me is the **power of remembering**. When we remember, the past somehow becomes inwardly present again. Remembering "takes us there" in our minds. We don't just remember the **events**; we remember the **whole story** of what happened -- how it *was* for us. And it **reorients our minds** with the thoughts & feelings & values of the story. Even if the events in themselves were very negative, if the story includes how we got through it; what we learned; how we grew and moved forward in our lives; then remembering it reorients our minds for the better.

That's what I learned from being with my grandfather, and when I remember him, it reorients my mind to those inner truths -- it allows me to "relearn" them, over & over again, in whatever my present circumstances may be.

When our memories have been well formed & shaped in such helpful ways, remembering takes us to "another world" that is "a better world." And "being there" (*inwardly*) ... helps us to see, to *understand*, how **another world is possible...** (*outwardly*). It's not just "nostalgia." It's transforming.

It's no coincidence that *Israel* is commanded by God *to remember*, and to teach their children (*and their childrens' children*) **the whole story** of their liberation from their captors, so that they **also** can remember -- and reorient their minds -- to persist in the practice of their faith; to find hope & courage in their own present circumstances, whatever they may be.

It's no coincidence that *The Church* is commanded by Christ *to remember* his death -- *not just the gruesome event*, but **the whole story** of it -- which includes our own personal immersion **into it**, our own personal liberation **by it**, our own personal **rising up & out of it**, together with him, with a **new** inner world, and a **new** possible life, in which his Spirit **reminds** us of him & **guides** us to follow his "Way."

Yes, Christ is **always** present -- "*yesterday, today, & forever*" -- but not always **consciously-present** to us. And so, "according to his gracious command," we "do this" in (*active, conscious*) "*remembrance of him*" --

We remember his death (*within us*) ...

We proclaim his resurrection ... (*within us*) ...

We await his coming in glory ... (*within us*) ...

We take his Body (*within us*) as bread.

We take his Blood (*within us*) as wine.

And slowly, we inwardly *digest* them. Slowly, we allow **them** to become part of **us** -- an integral part of our own bodies & hearts & minds. We allow them to nourish us, to spread throughout our inner systems and into our outward actions. Because.... we love him. Because he loves us. Because we want to be **like** him -- to **share** in his integrity -- to **know** (as Rishi said last Sunday) his "unusual happiness," and to share it with others, as he did.

Notice he doesn't just say "do this," but "do this in remembrance of me." He doesn't want us to "*just do it*." The Eucharist is an **Act of Remembrance**. We don't just walk in, get the bread, get the wine, and go. Instead, we get **the whole story**, each & every time. So we can inwardly remember. So it can "come alive" in our minds. So we can get "carried away" by it, into "another world," an "inner world," that is a "better world" -- where Jesus, Crucified & Risen, is our Lord -- and we -- are his Beloved.

And just in case the **variable parts** of the Liturgy -- *the songs, the sermon, the social interactions* -- don't go that well on a given Sunday, we also have **constant parts**, like the Eucharistic Prayer (*parts that are always there & that we're not allowed to meddle with.*) So that we always get fed; we always hear **the whole story**, even it wasn't clear for us in the singing & preaching & 'fellowshipping' that day. We do this in our tradition because we believe that **remembering is key** in our personal spiritual formation -- and in our collective formation as a spiritual community -- so we *don't want anyone to leave church without it!*

I know that this is a very "puny" analogy to use for eating the consecrated bread and drinking the consecrated wine, but -- the way the bread and wine get infused, over & over again, with the sacred story (*of Jesus' Life & Death & Resurrection & Ascension & Sending of the Holy Spirit to dwell within us*) -- it reminds me a bit of the "power" that a sip of black coffee has in my life....

The real **power** is not in the coffee itself, but *in the remembering* of my relationship with my grandfather -- *in the remembering* that makes the past *alive* in the present & nourishes & reorients my mind in helpful ways. The Eucharist is like that, in a way. But not really. It's not just a "trigger," like black coffee is for me.

In the remembering, the Bread and the Wine actually "become for us" the Body & Blood -- the Real Life -- of Christ *that we need to be consciously at work inside of us*. But it all happens in a way that words -- *however fancy* -- cannot explain. It's a "mystery," because It's *beyond words*. So I'm quite sure that -- even the greatest -- of theologians will never *"figure it all out."*

But one thing is very clear about this faith of ours: it's all about **remembering**. It's all about being taken back to a time before we were born, and even before that. It's all about inwardly **being in that sacred "place"** -- in the Loving Company of the Father, & the Son, & the Holy Spirit -- *simply being there -- in the here-and-now*.

But that's only "half" of the story.

It's *also* about still, somehow, *abiding there* in that inner holy place -- *as we "go forth" into the world of our everyday lives*. Still *remembering*. So that we "go forth" with a **confidence** that *"another world is possible"* -- for *us* -- and for *all those* we meet "out there." A confidence that gets nicely **tempered** with Christ's **humility**, so that it **accepts** whatever small parts we may -- *by the grace of God* -- be able to play in this grand, divine, scheme of things.

For Christians, every day is "Remembrance Day," because *Christian life itself, is an act of remembrance*.

The Sacred Liturgy teaches us this -- over & over & over again -- from the initial "Greeting" to the final "Sending Forth." So we'll remember.... what is truly worth remembering.

Let us pray:

May God give us daily -- all the grace & the wisdom & the courage that we need -- **to rightly remember Christ** -- and **to mould & shape all of our memories that arise** -- in ways that change our lives, and our world, for the better. May that become the legacy, the inheritance, we leave to those who will remember us. Amen

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