



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **Holy Thursday**

### ***Do this in memory of me***

*Readings: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14, Ps 115, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, John 13:1-15*

A few weeks ago I was listening to the wireless when I heard an item on 'Reminiscence Therapy'. Carers, social workers and psychologists who were dealing with people with dementia had carried out a series of trials via a local museum. They had created a room full of things from the 1940s and 50s. Here the old people could come and handle the once familiar and join in with songs and stories from that period and before, things they will have heard as children.

To their delight and astonishment the researchers discovered that this scenario enervated and enthused the people and had a lasting 'happy' effect on them for several days. They talked of little else.

That people should be happiest among things that are familiar and register with their memory should not surprise us. We know, from experience of friends and family, that the most distressing symptom of dementia is the inability to remember for remembrance gives us the very context for our present and the hope for our future.

It's fascinating but what's it got to do with tonight?

In a sense, all religious ritual is about remembering, from the Passover onwards. Tonight we celebrate the institution of the Mass and we will hear those familiar words once more. 'Do this in memory of me.'

For the non-religious it is easy to caricature the proceedings as no more than an exercise in comfort, a grand reminiscence therapy. We gather to remember the things we hold dear and which, from childhood in many cases, have nurtured our identity. We do indeed listen to familiar readings and sing, we hope, familiar songs. We take the bread and the wine. We don't lie on a banqueting couch or dress up in long 1<sup>st</sup> century robes (well you don't anyway).

But there is more to **this** remembrance than imitation or repetition.

Apart from anything else we are recalling something that, in truth, no one of us can actually remember. We were not in the Upper Room. We were not at the Calvary.

So what are we doing here tonight? We need to have an explanation for ourselves and for the majority of our once Christian civilisation which now suffers from religious dementia. This civilisation has forgotten its origin and its end. That is why it has forgotten to be at Mass.

The Remembrance of the Mass is of a wholly different order. It is not dependent on the faculty of the human brain. For the simple child to the frailest dying servant from whom all else has been stripped away, what happens on this altar has the same power that it has always had.

We are asked to be here. We are asked, in our penitent hearts and with glorifying praise, to ask the supervening power of Almighty God, through His Holy Spirit, to take our humble offerings of bread, wine and self and transform them into the Body of Christ.

As we kneel before the Calvary of Christ revealed on the altar of sacrifice, as that offering is taken by angels into heaven, we are invited into the worship of heaven where our time is lifted into the eternity of God. There we are re-membered, reunited, with our origin and our end. There we are in the Real Presence of Him who made all things. There we have a remembrance of Eden when Man walked in the Paradise of God. There we have a foretaste of Heaven where, in Christ, our humanity is lifted into His divinity. There we are surrounded by the whole company of the saints in light, our family throughout the world and throughout time.

It is why, whatever burdens we are carrying in this world, the Mass is always a moment of sweet joy. It is why we place Viaticum on the tongue of the dying.

We are not indulging in Reminiscence Therapy – a temporary way of recreating our own nostalgic childhood, a museum exercise that lasts an afternoon. But we are part of the true healing, the true Re-membering. This is the joining of Heaven and Earth, the reconciliation of God and Man, the transformation of our past, present and future into the eternal NOW of God..... which is forever.

This is why Jesus left us the Mass. It is why we are here tonight.

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