



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time-Year A-Remembrance Sunday-November
8th 2020

***Readings: Wisdom 6: 12-16, Psalm 62, 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18,
Matthew 25: 1-13***

When I first became a Catholic I can remember being mildly shocked by the understatement, in the liturgy, of this great national event. But then I swiftly came to realise that, for Catholics, remembrance of the dead is a daily event, not confined to one grand outing in the season of the dead. And that all our Masses are remembrance of the sacrificial death of Him whose death and Resurrection gives hope to every fallen child of Man as he faces up to his mortality, whether in war or in peace.

Remembrance, in the wider view, has been very much on my mind over the last few months. My children asked me, a while ago, if I could record some memories. Over lockdown I found myself at my desk in the pre-dawn dark typing out 1000 words most mornings on people, places, events that have made up our lives. The total is now up at 100,000 words. They now receive these, in Dickensian fashion, by weekly instalment. It is the nearest I shall come to autobiography.

They are astonished that I can remember so much. I, conversely, am amazed at the huge gaps in the ragged tapestry of memory and those vanished moments now tantalisingly beyond recall.

When they asked me what I wanted for my recent large birthday and all future birthdays, it was simple. I need nothing except to be ‘remembered’ at the Mass and each is now committed, on chosen special dates, to have the Mass offered for me for their lifetimes. I can think of no finer ‘present’ or present than to be thus presented to the Presence in this supreme act of love and familial solidarity.

The subject struck home to me again just last week. I came across a letter from the wife of one of my great missionary heroes. The great man had dementia. His memory had gone. I sat down and wrote him a long letter and was delighted when he telephoned me the next day. In a long and lovely conversation I was able, from my own depleted stock, to refurbish some of our common memories and remind him who he was and how much so many owed him. He can no longer take services but he can remember why he follows Jesus.

At Mass, the next day, in another church, a lady apologised to me. ‘I’m so sorry. I have dementia. I don’t remember you. All my memories are gone now. And your memories are who you are aren’t they?’ I could have wept. For we are truly the sum of our past and the losing of it is a terrifying and lonely tragedy.

The other thing I asked my children to do, ever the demanding parent, was to write a side of A4 on a memory of theirs. First one back was a beautiful essay from my daughter – laughter and tears abound.

But she prefaced it with a reflection on the nature of memory itself. She wrote: ‘Most things I ‘remember’ because they are family legend, told over and over when we are together to remind us of funny, sad, joyful or bizarre times or situations. In trying to think back I’ve started to question what my actual memory is and what is a memory that has been painted by a story being retold over the years. Just a casual existential crisis. No need for alarm.’

Dementia – the looming tragedy of our time – is forgetting.

The root is *dimenticare*, the Italian for forget.

But the tragedy is not simply an individual existential crisis though that is the pathology of our decaying control panel. It is much deeper.

We live in a society, a culture, a once upon a time civilisation, that has forgotten its origin and its end. It has forgotten God.

It has, therefore, no explanation for its being – other than the implausible and statistically unscientific randomness of the coincidence of matter and energy. It has no quantifiable or identifiable purpose other than sheer aimless survival. It has no coherent and communal mores by which we may live together. ‘The relativist lie of ‘your truth and my truth’ is a recipe for the triumph of the worst of Man.

It is the most profound existential crisis – one of our very existence.

When Catechetics preferred the rehearsal of ‘issues’ to the great stories of the Faith, we added to the problem. There was nothing now for the next generation to refer to. They were not forgetful. They had never been told in the first place.

Telling the stories, replaying our common history, the history of salvation, is the very essence of the *Traditio*, the tradition, the handing on, the common thread, the thing that makes sense of who we are and why we do things.

Dementia is not just an illness that afflicts the old. It can also afflict societies and institutions. Then the tragic harmlessness of the individual afflicted, magnifies into a corporate demented state with all the crazed evil that implies.

The Old Enemy loves us to forget who we are and whence we come and whither our destiny in the loving purposes of God.

The United States of America has just elected a man who, born into the Catholic Faith, now espouses the great philosophical enemies of God. He is a rampant enthusiast for the involuntary euthanasia of the innocent-

abortion, a celebrant of homosexual 'marriage' and an advocate of transgender mutilation. Joe Biden has forgotten who he is. He has apostasised while still shipping up at the Communion rail to receive the One whom he rejects.

But he is not alone. When a man forgets who he is, tragedy stalks. Whether he be the President of the United States, the Pope in Rome or the humblest parish priest or layman in the pew.

The sacred task of the faithful, in these demented times, is to remember. To tell the stories. To call men back to sanity, health, truth, salvation. To the Cross of Christ and the Remembrance of the Mass wherein the eternal victory is proclaimed in this great memorial of the cosmic war with the ancient enemy of God and Man. To the triumph of Christ.