REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2026

At the end of many years of bitter warfare, which had cost England the loss of nearly five percent of her population, a lone voice called upon people to 'Remember'. That conflict was, of course, the English Civil War; and the voice was that of King Charles I, whose admonition before he was beheaded on a scaffold at Whitehall in January 1649 was to 'Remember'. And, whilst his counsel was to contemplate the consequences of religious division and regicide as much as those of war itself, the call to remembrance of conflicts past and present, and those who have lost their lives in them, remains insistent and necessary, particularly as we survey the contemporary international scene, and take seriously the increasing threats to our own security, prosperity and peace.

But, the word and concept of remembrance have many connotations; and what one person thinks about on this day will differ markedly from the thoughts of another. Few are the people today who knew someone who fought or died in the Second World War; just as, due to the more localised scale of subsequent conflicts of the last and present centuries, the mourning of those killed in active service is no longer a pressing national concern. And, perhaps because of this, the proper understanding of the nature and purpose of remembrance has largely been lost: for, without a grounding in the reality of human loss and sacrifice, remembrance can so easily become a mawkish glorification of war, a justification of crude and aggressive nationalism; and, in the Welsh priest-poet R. S. Thomas's

words, a 'hankering after an imagined past'. And this is why remembrance properly understood and practised must be rooted in the distinctive Christian doctrines of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the Communion of Saints; for, without them, any acts of remembrance or hopes for peace are liable to be erroneously invested in human endeavour and the inevitability of progress, rather than in the supernatural grace and providential mercy of God.

Christian remembrance, then, is not simply a clinical calling to mind of the past, nor is it the means by which we don't forget the lessons of history, important as they are; rather, it is the process by which we and the world around us are restored and put back together – literally re-membered – as we use the sacramental power of Christ's Cross and Resurrection to reconcile what is divided, and extend to others the forgiveness and grace that we have received from God. The act of remembrance is, thus, a deliberate commitment to be part of Jesus' ongoing work of reconciling humanity to God, which includes living peaceably and praying for peace; just as it requires us to acknowledge our own complicity in the fragmentation of human relationships and society. The whole Christian life is a process of being re-membered: of being healed personally of the dis-integration caused by sin, and of giving of ourselves sacrificially in making reconciliation a reality for others by pursuing peace, justice and freedom for all. Of course, we can only do this in the power of the victory that has already been won over sin and death by Christ's crucifixion and resurrection; and that is why

our remembrance of those who have died is most properly and fully expressed in the context of the Mass, in which all our remembrances find their collective embodiment. For it is here at the altar, as we re-present the sacrifice of Calvary to our heavenly Father for the salvation of those who have died and for our own, that we are most closely united within the Communion of Saints as we ever can be on this earth. In the eucharistic action, Christ and his saving passion are made present; and the fruits of his atoning work are applied severally and dynamically to those on another shore and in a greater light, just as much as they give us grace and healing now. In this, the greatest act of remembrance, the whole Church is united in and through Jesus, her head; and our prayers at Mass for those have died in Christ are an act of charity, assisting them spiritually, who are held even now in the eternal life and safe-keeping of God. True remembrance, then, is not about pride and patriotism, though they have their place; but about the commitment to engage in the costly work of reconciliation, and of recognising that that work is the co-operation between humanity and the divine, begun in the Incarnation, and now entrusted to us by the Spirit's grace. Remembrance is nostalgic reminiscence if it does not lead to action; tokenistic memorializing if it does not lead to change. Our patriotic duty, to this nation and to the Kingdom of Heaven, which is our true and eternal home, is to work so that the former might better resemble the latter; and, by our remembrance, to remind this world that of both heaven and earth Christ is King. Amen.