

Sermon from St. George's Church

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November 6, 2011

Today we celebrate Remembrance Day. We emphasize the importance of remembering, with specific reference to lives lost in past wars. Amongst other armed conflicts we particularly remember today the 68,000 Canadian lives lost in WW1 and the 47,500 lives lost in WW2 & Korea. We can remember also the 160 lives lost in Canadian peacekeeping missions and the 97 lives lost in Afghanistan. We give thanks today for the lives of these people who secured for us the freedom and peace we enjoy today.

I was reading in the Gazette of the new refurbished war memorial in Lachine. There is the statue of a solitary soldier standing. And the plaque below reads "Lest we forget". This phrase comes from a poem called "Recessional" by Rudyard Kipling written for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. The first two stanzas go like this

*God of our fathers, known of old—
Lord of our far-flung battle line—
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine—
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!*

*The tumult and the shouting dies—
The Captains and the Kings depart—
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,*

*An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!*

One way to know the importance of remembering is to think of the tragedy of forgetting. Just yesterday I was talking to someone and I had to admit that I simply could not remember something. How frustrating. And as we get older, the worse it gets. And of course there is that terrible disease of Alzheimer's. I will never forget visiting the father of one of my best friends who suffered from this disease. He had always been so sharp with his mind, but now his mind was gone. He did not recognize me or his son. About the only thing he did recognize were the lyrics to 1940's songs. He was, so to speak, disconnected. He had forgotten most things, and therefore was severed from his own life and family. It is such a tragedy when we forget. And conversely, what a blessing it is when we remember.

The importance of remembering is deeply engrained in our human nature. Remembering allows us to better understand ourselves, our fellow humans, and all of God's creation around us. In a religious sense remembering is an essential part of our faith. Take a look at the Bible, it is what the people of God remembered and thought so important that they spoke of it to each other, and then wrote it down. As we celebrate the communion today we give thanks, that is what "eucharist" means, we give thanks as we remember what Christ has done for us. His instruction to us is to "Do this in remembrance of me." As you receive communion you will hear me say "Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you."

In our life of faith, to remember is to embrace life. We must never forget that Jesus died, was buried, but rose again to new life. Jesus clearly states this in our Gospel today, he says, *I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.* Will never die! Yes. Jesus is all about restoring people to wholeness and new life, and bringing them forward in power and in strength. This is why we must remember, for it leads us to eternal life.

In our Gospel, Martha, who is grieving the loss of her brother Lazarus, is somewhat confused as she speaks to Jesus. She is sad at the loss of her brother. She is mad that Jesus did not come earlier to heal Lazarus. She boldly states that she knows God will give Jesus whatever he asks for. She knows about resurrection in the last day but is still confused about her immediate circumstances. Jesus is able to speak into her confusion with reassuring words that he is the resurrection and the life, for Lazarus, and for her. In fact Jesus says this for everyone. He is saying it to all generations who are to come, including us. For Jesus is here today to bring each one of us towards eternal life. It is his promise, and the keystone of our hope. As we remember Jesus' death and resurrection, we know that we are saved and will be with God forever. Remembering gives us life.

The apostle Peter calls this life our living hope. In our Epistle reading today we heard; *3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,*

kept in heaven for you." What encouraging words. As we remember Jesus we come to know his mercy, and our living hope in him. That there is an inheritance kept in heaven for us all.

So today let us remember together. Let us realize that remembering is really important. For as we remember Jesus together we are all given the opportunity to see new life happening.

As we leave here this morning, let us also remember Martha's words to Jesus. After hearing that he is the resurrection and the life, she says; *"Yes, Lord, I believe"* Today, as we remember together, let us give thanks that as we believe, the Lord gives us life, even eternal. Today, as we remember, let us give thanks for the freedom and peace we enjoy, and for the Lord of life. And let us never forget.

Amen.