

We do like photographs. We keep photographs in our wallets, our purses, sideboards and mantelpieces; on the walls of our houses. Some people still keep albums of photos, neatly labelled and arranged. Much more likely these days our photographs are stored on our mobile phones, with a number of short video clips also. Either way, photographs evoke memories of past events: they freeze-frame for us moments in time, usually moments of greatest celebration such as weddings, first days at school, graduations, success at sports, etc. Either way, in these fading images our recollection of the past is re-experienced, almost as if no time has elapsed.

There is a strange phrase in our liturgy - lifted out of the Gospel narratives - which explains this phenomena of the past being experienced in our immediate present, but it is often lost to us because of its familiarity: "Do this in remembrance of me". Jesus said this at the last supper as he took bread, then wine. At the Passover meal there were many other items, and several ritual cups of wine. However, over these two commonplace items he uses the word 'remembrance'. What is going on here?

In our English psyche - especially for those who have been involved with the armed forces - the word 'remembrance' is closely identified with the 11th November: Remembrance Day. It is more than a harking back to the past, and in our own way being thankful. It is to enjoy the benefits of our freedom today, won by the blood of those who died in two world wars and conflicts since, in order to make this world a safer and better place to live in. This is getting close to what Jesus meant at the Last Supper.

Remembrance Day is only one day in the year. However, when we use this word daily in our Liturgy - and the Eucharistic Prayer in particular - we are no longer looking at a snapshot of time, or merely being grateful: it is as if the event were unfolding before us, and a veil has been removed - we are at Calvary. That is why we use the phrase 'the sacrifice of the mass'. This is why we attach particular rituals around the altar; why the sign of the cross is so important to us and, most importantly, why there has to be a crucifix on or near the altar. Despite the thinning out of transcendent meaning which has occurred since the 1960s, the mass is still the mass. It demands of us the greatest reverence and attention. Each time we attend mass we take part - we participate - in the crucifixion and sacrifice of Jesus. The obligation to attend mass on Sunday's and holy days of obligation - soon to be restored - is an obligation to attend, and not receive communion. As Catholics, we experience the saving effects of Jesus in history each time we gather for the sacrifice of the mass.

Here are some practical rules that the Church gives us for making a good Communion with God, with a few others appended by myself :

- We should only receive Holy Communion when we are in a sufficient state of grace.
- If in doubt, go to Confession ... at least once a year, but preferably once a month. You can always make a Spiritual Communion whilst you are at mass.
- Refrain from eating or drinking for one hour before mass begins, unless of course you are on medication, very young, or elderly.

- Please don't come to church chewing gum; leave your mobile phone behind; read the Bible Readings quietly before mass at home; say a Prayer for your priest and fellow-Christians in your church community.
- Chose your manner of clothes and how you wear them with modesty, allowing everyone to focus on what is really important - Jesus.
- Stay until the end of mass, when you have been dismissed, and greet your fellow Christians, especially visitors.

One thing which characterises St Paul's early church communities was their sense of belonging to Christ, and their fellowship with each other. By approaching the reality of the Mass with due reverence, we will transform our lives, and our own communities also.