

Faith Remembers And Celebrates.

Text: Psalm 25:6

1) Faith Remembers and Celebrates

Suggested Hymns:

2) A family Reunion

401, 337, 155, 75, 85

3) The highest Celebration

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is based on part of the introit for today, Psalm 25:6, *6 Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses, For they are from of old.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The chief thought of the introit for today is Remember.

One of the most precious gifts of God is the gift of memory. It is this, more than anything else, which makes progress possible. For if we were creatures who had no recollection of the past, our existence, and every moment of it, would be isolated incidents in the course of human history.

We would live for the present, and that only. Our lives would have no continuity, no cohesion within themselves, and bear no relationship in our minds to the long succession of people and events which have come before us, and which have contributed to the shaping of civilisation as it is today.

There would exist no tender associations between one human being and another if we would forget another's face and character as soon as he was out of sight. We would indeed be intent upon nothing else than grasping the thing before us, having learned nothing from past experiences, and with no regard for others to control our conduct.

This gift of memory is perverted when people remember evil things instead of good; when they harbour resentment because of some past wrong; when they cannot forget an injury. Needless to say, such an attitude is not Christian.

One cannot be happy unless one forgets, as well as forgives, the injustices that are done to us. Our minds ought to dwell on the good things of the past: the

friends we have had, the pleasures we have experienced together, the thousand and one character-building agencies that have influenced our lives, and helped to form a character that is healthy and strong and conformed to the image of Christ.

One characteristic of such memories will almost always be noted: some other person plays an important part in them. Perhaps that person has long since passed out of our lives because of death, moved, or other reasons; but that person lives in recollection, so that experiences of years gone by become a present joy and even the cause of celebration.

Now all this may at first glance seem to be quite secular, but upon a closer examination it will be found that a proper use of this gift of memory is essential to a vital faith. Let us understand that *faith remembers and celebrates*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Faith Remembers And Celebrates

Whenever some past event has been of extraordinary significance, and the memory of it very strong, we have a celebration. In the nation's life special holidays are set apart for the remembrance of founders and heroes, victories and deliverances, and other aspects of national good fortune. Thus we annually celebrate Australia Day and ANZAC Day.

The old-fashioned agricultural shows and the new-fashioned industrial exhibitions are in effect celebrations of the products of the land and the achievements of toil.

Much of the charm of domestic life centres about intimate family celebration. A man gets a raise in pay and takes his wife out to dinner, just for a little celebration.

There are the children's birthdays and the parents' wedding anniversaries, to say nothing of family reunions. All these things are occasions of vivid recollection. They remember again the original event which through the passage of the years has become important to the life of people or nations.

Perhaps this may express itself in paging through an old photo album, in telling stories beginning, "Do you remember when?" and above all, in the thought of happiness once enjoyed and now brought again to the foreground of memory. So the celebration becomes an occasion of present enjoyment.

The past event is recalled not from a sense of duty, but largely as an opportunity for a new festival occasion.

One danger to be guarded against is that the original significance of the event celebrated may become lost in the perpetuation of the custom for its own sake. Such celebrations, of course, are purely formal, and people celebrate for the mere joy of celebrating, without giving the least thought to the reason for it.

For a celebration to be heartfelt, the event of the past must be appreciated in the present.

What has all this to do with faith? Simply this: that celebration is perhaps the most prominent aspect of the Christian faith.

The people of Israel were accustomed to observe a number of great days which commemorated past events. The Passover recalled the Exodus, and the Feast of the Tabernacles recalled the forty years in the wilderness.

Above all, the Day of Atonement was a celebration of something not yet done, but which was regarded as being so certain that the prophets had spoken of it as a thing of the past. Thus Isaiah, more than five hundred years before the crucifixion, wrote ***Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrow.***¹

It is at this point that we begin to see the place of celebration in the New Testament church. We have had a most miraculous past. Add to the great events of Old Testament history the infinitely significant events in the life of our Lord, add to that nearly two thousand years of martyrs and saints of every description giving evidence of the power of the Gospel, and you have an uncounted number of memories which the church has accumulated and cherished.

Our whole faith rests on something that was accomplished in the past. It is the memory of the incarnate Son of God, as He was here on earth, that is the centre of our faith.

The story of how Jesus came, to the accompaniment of angelic songs; of how, when He grew up, He healed the sick, raised the dead, forgave sins; of how finally He yielded Himself as the spotless sacrifice for human sin and came forth from the tomb on the third day to live and reign over His church forever.

This matchless story, handed down through generations of saints and preserved to the world's end in Holy Scripture — of all this we do, as it were, in

the first verse of today's Introit, ***6 Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses, For they are from of old.***

It is Christ whom the church celebrates, and her celebration dare not become a mere form, as the 26th of January is for many people, but the reason for it must be studied, marvelled at, prayed for, gloried in, and rejoiced over.

When the significance of the life, death, and resurrection of our Saviour has been lost, then the church no longer has anything to celebrate. And it has been lost in many sections of what once was part of Christendom. Dear friends, we dare not lose it.

We must pray to God the Holy Spirit that we may never cease to remember the Lord Jesus Christ, how *“for us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven ... and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.”*

If we forget it, then we should close our churches, silence our organs, dismiss our ministers, and use our altars for firewood, because without the loving-kindness of God as expressed in the person of His Son, there can be no true faith.

So, then, as is the case with all celebrations, Christian celebration is at once a recollection of past events and a present joy. The more vividly the great events of the Gospel stand out in our minds, the greater our joy will be.

It all comes down to this, that we must experience the abiding presence of Christ. This requires a certain detachment of spirit, a frequent withdrawal from the world; in word, and practice. It means a deliberate concentration on the glorious truths for which our Lord suffered and died.

One cannot expect to be continually engrossed with secular affairs and at the same time increase and deepen one's store of sacred memories. There will be no development of spirituality unless the thing is practised. We have to take time out — and plenty of it, too — for prayer, for Bible reading, for meditation, for hymn singing, for listening to sermons, for worship.

In other words, if we don't, then we are going to forget. We forget very easily anyhow. Our memories are not as retentive as they should be, and when it comes to our Christian faith, our memories need to be constantly refreshed. This is why we celebrate Christmas and Easter every year.

We must think of the loving-kindness of God, as the psalmist says, or the loving-kindness of God will become a meaningless phrase instead of the vital reality it is. Thus all life will be one long celebration in which we daily and hourly recall God's mercies, and on the basis of that, rejoice in the present and take hope for the future.

The hymnist wrote,²

We sing the praise of Him who died,
Of Him who died upon the cross;
The sinner's hope let men deride,
For this we count the world but loss.

Inscribed upon the cross we see,
In shining letters, 'God is love';
He bears our sins upon the tree;
He brings us mercy from above.

The cross! it takes our guilt away;
It holds the fainting spirit up;
It cheers with hope the gloomy day,
And sweetens every bitter cup.

2. A Family Reunion

This lifelong celebration is not always on the same spiritual pitch. There are times when we do not feel much like celebration, and there are times which are a great exaltation of heart, high-spots that bring us to the very gate of heaven.

Such an uplifting experience is very likely to occur on a Sunday, because that is the day when the church has a special celebration in commemoration of her Lord's resurrection. Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday morning, and therefore we always have church on Sunday in preference to any other day of the week. The Service is in the nature of a family reunion.

Jesus, the Head of the house is here, as He has promised us in Matthew 18:20, that *where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*

Some of the children are present, but not all of them. You know how it is at a family reunion when someone is absent. “Too bad Uncle John and Aunt Martha aren’t here,” we say. That is how we feel when some are absent from our weekly celebration in God’s house.

They are missing the stimulation of the presence of the rest of the family, and they sadden the Father’s heart, because He would like to see them again.

And when so-and-so is absent without any good reason, we get a little impatient. He doesn’t seem to know what he is missing. He appears rather selfish. He would rather be off on some excursion of his own. He thinks family reunions are something of a bore.

We wish he would wake up to the fact that Church Services are festival in nature, an occasion for joy and thanksgiving, and an encouragement and stimulation to a more wholesome life. We can only pray that if such misguided individuals persist in forgetting about God, that God will not say, “*I never knew you,*” when He comes to judgement.³

Beside these weekly celebrations there are some special ones, the great festivals of the church year, such as Christmas, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Harvest Thanksgiving Sunday and Reformation Sunday.

Some people only attend Services such as Christmas and Easter. However, if they understood properly the meaning of the birth and resurrection of our Lord, they would be present at every celebration centring around Him.

The church of God stands for the most glorious things that can be celebrated, and we pray that all people everywhere would realise that, and join with us now and always.

3. The Highest Celebration

The highest and most often repeated celebration which the church has is the blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Some statistician might try to compute how often Holy Communion has been celebrated since our Lord instituted it the night He was betrayed. It would make an enormous total.

Whenever and wherever, in whatever language — as often as the Eucharist has been said or sung, it has always been in the most intimate and joyful sense of the word a celebration.

For there is no better way of recalling our Saviour to memory than to do what He did in the upper room: to take bread and give it to His disciples; and there is no better way for the disciples to remember the significance of His action than to eat of the bread He so graciously gives. Our Lord meant the blessed sacrament to be a memorial of His Passion. “Do this,” He said, “in remembrance of Me!”⁴

When we celebrate Holy Communion, it is something more than the ordinary rehearsal of the meaning of the Gospel. Added to the memories of the past, there is something which is very much in the present: the living Saviour comes among us as a pledge of the truth of our faith, and enters into our bodies as an individual sealing of the salvation He has won for all people.

The Head of the household is present at this kind of family reunion in a very real and vital manner, and together with us He again pleads His great sacrifice to the Father. What a celebration this is: a commemoration of the most precious truth known to man: the atonement; a heavenly banquet at which the One in whose honour the feast is held is present, and the food is nothing less than His own body and blood!

How highly privileged you and I are to be present at such a meeting! No wonder this celebration is called Eucharist — a thanksgiving for all the divine treasures given to us through this means of grace!

That is why, again, the church rejoices when the faithful grow in appreciation of this great Gift and make greater use of it by partaking of the Lord’s altar frequently. For He is there, of whose glory heaven and earth are full and at whose coming we cry, “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!*”⁵

Dear friends in Christ, let our lives be joyful and festive. We have the greatest love bestowed, the highest power given, the most notable victories promised. Let us celebrate these things by living in, and with, and for our Lord Jesus Christ, now and forever! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Isaiah 53:4

² Hymn 75 v 1-3

³ Matthew 7:23

⁴ Luke 22:19

⁵ Matthew 21:9