

# Memory plays central role in church's celebrations

Last week we commemorated the second anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on America. It was very different from the first anniversary one year ago, but the poignancy and effects of our memories of the tragedy have hardly diminished.

Memory is in many ways a central mystery in life. Humanity relies on memory to tie us to our past and to give direction to our future. Christianity gives central place to memory, particularly in our liturgy. In fact, memory is the other side of celebration in the Christian religion — even our most horrible memories become the core of what we celebrate. Finally, it is memory that makes belief possible: “We remember how you loved us to your death. And still we celebrate, for you are with us here. And we believe that we will see you when you come in your glory, Lord. We remember. We believe.”

From the earliest traditions of Christianity, in the Letters of Paul and particularly around I Corinthians 11, we hear the call to “do this in memory of me.” In the third eucharistic prayer we pray: “Father, calling to mind the death your Son endured for our salvation, his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven, and ready to greet him when he comes again ...”

Memory is surely associated with the actions of Christ in the Eucharist. In fact, it is always in the mem-



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The Moral Life

ory of Christ that the church assembles. The recollection of Christ's story provides the context for proclamation of the biblical word, celebration of the sacraments, offering of prayer. One theologian has called the church itself the “table and story-telling community.” We are the group that takes as its very mission remembering the story of Jesus, proclaiming it and celebrating it around our common table.

In this sense, memory is not simply a mental recall of something that happened in the past, nor an exercise of fond recollection of someone now absent. Recalling the events of Christ's life and God's activities on our behalf before God in worship makes present what is at the heart of all that God has done: the love of God made visible in the faithful and obedient self-giving of Jesus back to his father. This is the grounds for the church's hope.

Memory is at the heart of all Christian prayer. When we raise our hearts to God we recall the past in order to hope in the future. When I

taught eighth grade, our class would form intentions to pray for every morning. Some were trivial (like winning an afternoon baseball game against another grammar school), but I tried to use the concerns on the minds of my young students to reinforce this basic form of Christian prayer: memory transformed into hope.

Tying in the church's use of memory “for the sake of our salvation” relates to our need to remember Sept. 11 so that it does not diminish us. Recalling the events of that day is not nearly enough. The heart of our Christian faith calls us to allow even our most painful memories to become more than a call for revenge. The transformation of memories before God in community is what can bring us confidently into the future.

We are all too close to Sept. 11, 2001, to make any final judgments about what our memories of that time will ultimately mean for us. Still, there is a profound need within us to connect even the horrifying images we hold of that day with God's profound love for us. Indeed, God's faithfulness remains — through national attack, destruction and death, through personal trials of all sorts. We remember how he has saved us, and we experience his presence even in these frightening times.

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Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

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ly reflect a miserable way of life. The true insight lies in the remedy, which the Church teaches are the Mass, frequent reception of the Sacraments — especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation — and prayer.

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## Return first fruits to God

To the editor:

In the Old Testament, Cain offered God a sacrifice of his “leftovers” rather than the first fruits of his harvest. His offering offended God because it showed that Cain mistakenly thought that the best of his fruits resulted from his own labors, not from God's gifts. When God showed His displeasure with Cain's attitude and rationalizations, Cain committed a grievous sin against his brother Abel who had offered the best from his flocks to the Lord. Consequently, Cain's refusal to do God's will led to his earthly banishment and possibly, the loss of heaven.

As a participant in the Partners in Faith campaign,

I am saddened by the rationalizations put forth in response to the Church's call to live the Beatitudes. It appears that like Cain, many people have forgotten that everything we have is a gift from God. We lost our sense that it is necessary for our salvation to return to God a portion of the first fruits of our labors. The Bible states that an offering of 10 percent of our first fruits are to be returned to the Lord. This portion is very small compared to the priceless gifts of faith, the Eucharist, and love God showers upon us. Take another moment to review the suggested contribution asked for by Bishop Clark. I am confident that it is much less than 10 percent. Reflect upon the gifts from God that make it possible for you to have a home, food, job, Church, etc. and pledge a reasonable portion of your first fruits to God. Trust in God that your sacrificial offering will be put to proper use and that in His infinite mercy and justice, He will welcome His followers into heaven to spend eternity with Abel.

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