



Anglican Catholic Church



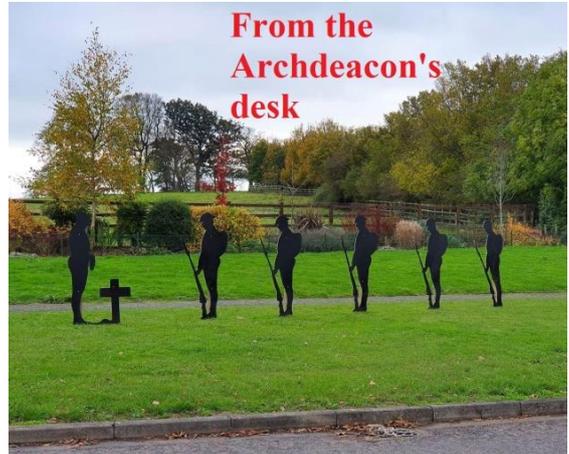
Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

October 2021

My dear friends and colleagues,

Remembrance Sunday is just around the corner. Remembrance encompasses all of us, our loved ones, our families, our friends. Remembrance envelopes and enfolds our entire nation and all those who have served her over the centuries which have passed, to the present, and for the future. Remembrance is timeless, and it has no bounds. Remembrance has a particular quality, and it is that quality which causes us each November to mark the end of the World Wars and all other conflicts in which people have lost their lives.



“Remembrance” is a word and a concept which is actually very different from “remembering”. To remember is to recall, whereas to make an act of remembrance, especially in remembrance-tide is to bring the past into the present so that the present may be affected by it. It tries to recapture feelings and sights and sounds. That is what poppies are about – to help us put ourselves into those trenches, gaze over those ruined landscapes and those brave little red flowers, that mud, that wire, that destruction, and feel that pain.

When I was much younger I worked with men who had been in the trenches in the First World War and had seen and experienced horrendous things which they were very reluctant to talk about. Both my grandfathers experienced things in that war which are the stuff of nightmares, and would never discuss it, as did my father in the Second World War. It is difficult of course to even try to imagine the horrors, but try we must. For if remembrance is for anything it is to show us that the love the Creator has given us is greater than any earthly power and cannot be destroyed. It is for reminding us that there are few winners in war and if we can do something about the barriers which divide person from person and nation from nation we might just be able to build a greater world.

So we are invited at this time to contemplate at least two things. First, sadness, sympathy and respect for those who are directly scarred by or involved in the tragedy of war. Secondly, shame and horror for what we have done to one another. At the same time, we are called to be co-workers with God in the building of his Kingdom on earth. Through our actions, positive and creative, we set about to change the patterns of this world that have made, or perhaps still make, hatred and resentment, poverty and unemployment, war and death. We should not just pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God and contemplate the implications of its arrival, but actually take a significant and active part in the preparation of its foundation.

With every blessing

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All Saints and All Souls

October and November are months of contrasts, almost conflicts – a tussle between summer’s warmth and winter’s chill. There are still those lovely, sunny, golden autumn days; still there are a few late flowers blooming in the flower beds. But we never know during these months whether we will wake up tomorrow morning to a covering of frost or even snow.

The calendar of the Church’s year follows closely the cycle of nature’s seasons, and for that calendar, too, November is a month of contrasts. It makes its entrance with the great Festival of All Saints – a celebration of the glorious harvest of the spirit, of sanctity ripened, gathered in, stored up and treasured in the heavenly Jerusalem. It is a glorious festival of joy, and peace, and life brought to fulfilment – the golden days of autumn, and a festival clothed in gold and white.

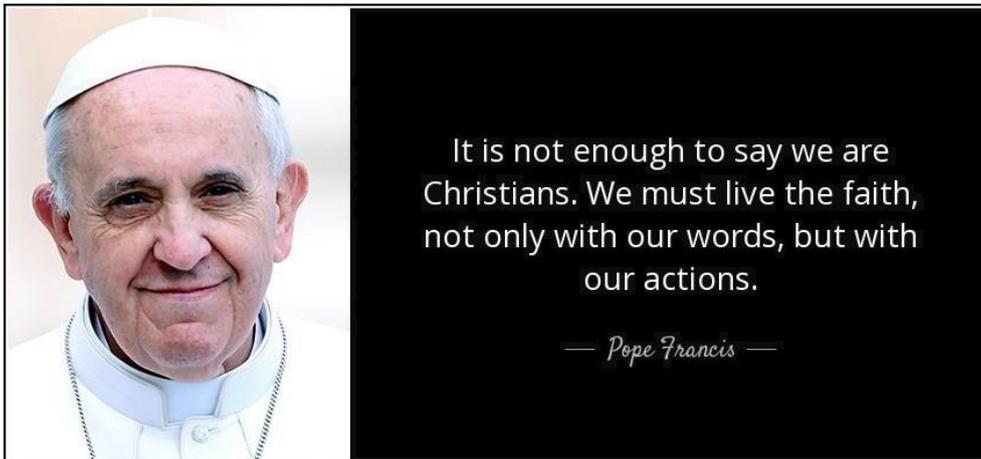
But then, the very next day, the livery of the church, the altar frontals and vestments, are changed to black for the observance of All Souls’ Day and Mass is said for all the faithful souls departed. The tone of the ancient mass of requiem is far from cheerful, “Dies irae, dies illa,” says the 13th century sequence hymn by Thomas of Celano – “Day of wrath and doom impending/David’s word with Sibyl’s blending/Heaven and earth in ashes ending.” All very solemn and austere.

In contrast to current fashions in Christian piety, which insists that we are all “Resurrection People”, and funeral Mass vestments are white instead of the traditional black, the ancient Mass of requiem implies that we are not all quite saints yet, and that getting to be saints may be a painful and difficult business: a narrow gate, a long road, with judgment at the end of it.

Sanctity is a problem, is it not? As we learn from the All Saints’ Day gospel, sanctity means pure of heart: “Blessed are the pure in heart,” says Jesus, “for they shall see God.” That is to say, to be a saint is to will in all things only the pure and simple and perfect and good, which is God: to love God with all the heart, and all the soul, and all the mind, and with all the strength, and in the perspective of that love, to love one’s neighbour as oneself. That is purity of heart. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

So which of us is pure of heart? Our wills, our lives, our loves and intentions, are certainly far from simple. We will so many things, so many “goods”, so many “bads”, and sometimes we get them mixed up; and, as St Paul says, even the good that we would do, we do not, and the evil that we would not do is precisely what we do. Our goodness is sometimes very limited, and like the late autumn flowers, it’s really pretty fragile.

We pray for the departed, as we pray for one another here and now. We do not cease to have any responsibility when we commend them to God. We still have a duty of care, a duty to pray for them, and we plead Christ’s sacrifice for them and for ourselves. The prayer is essentially the same: that God, who works in them and us, will save and nurture and bring to fruition our little fragments of spiritual life, that we may come at last to the peace of the saints, the purity of heart which wills only one thing.



(My “desk picture” shows an Isle of Sheppey scene viewed from my desk, from the garden, or within a few minutes of it.)