

**MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER
THURSDAY 17 APRIL 2014
ST. DAVID'S CATHEDRAL
ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK**

One of the saddest experiences of my life was to see witness someone to whom I was close experience the long, lonely farewell of Alzheimer's disease. I could understand the clinical description of "... protein plaques and tangles developing in the structure of the brain causing the death of brain cells with consequent memory loss, change in behavioural patterns and mood swings". What was difficult to understand and deal with was the uncertainty and emotional pain of the gradual withdrawal of this person from what we usually call normal life.

Memory is a precious thing. The memories we have of parents and loved ones, of special events and places are especially so. But try as we might to hold onto memories, they fade as life gets busier, we get older and experiences and responsibilities crowd in. That is true of us as individuals and as a society as well. One of the dangers of a fragmented society is the lack of shared experience, loss of common memory and even identity.

Memory is an important word in the life of the Church too. Every day we remember that it was on the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and wine and said: Take. Eat, drink. My Body. My Blood. Our faith tells us that in those words and actions he gave a foretaste of the sacrifice he was to make of himself on the cross on Good Friday. At the Last Supper, he added those solemn words which have come down to us through the ages: "Do this in memory of me".

How has that memory been kept alive? Is it just by the spoken word? Is it written in a few ancient books brought out year by year to keep the tradition alive? The answer of our faith is a resounding "no". Our memory of Jesus isn't something fading further and further into the past like a piece of forgotten history or ancient tradition. At this altar, and at every altar in every time and place down through the ages, followers of Jesus have come together to re-present, re-member, put back together again the Body of Christ which is the Church. We listen to his story in the scriptures. We translate it into the circumstances of our lives. We confess our failure to

respond to his invitation to live a love filled life. And tonight we follow his example. “If I, your Lord and Master have washed your feet, you should wash each others feet”. Self sacrificing service is the key to love. The ultimate gift of love is the life blood of Jesus poured out on the cross for us.

As a sign of that loving service, we make a gift of charity at the Offertory of the Mass. We offer something of ourselves for those in need of our care, not just economically, but spiritually and emotionally too. What we give is “the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands” – our hands, our work, our lives in solidarity with other members of Christ’s Body here on earth. The bread and wine which symbolise this offering of ourselves become “The Bread of life. The Spiritual Drink”. They become Jesus Himself.

At the end of Mass we take the Sacrament of his Abiding Presence amongst us to the Altar of Repose. That procession signifies many things, not least our following him on his journey from the Upper Room of the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane. But the Blessed Sacrament is also called “Viaticum” Food for the Journey”. It is food and nourishment for each of us on our journey of life and in our journey of faith. We sing the ancient hymn by St. Thomas Aquinas, the Pange Lingua. We profess our faith in the words:

Therefore we before Him bending
This great Sacrament revere,
Types and shadows have their ending
For the newer rite is here.
Faith, our outward sense befriending,
Makes the inward vision clear.