

## The Chaplain writes...*about Remembering*

November is a month shot through with the activity of *remembering*. Something that Christian people are constantly doing, of course, yet in this part of the year there are added dimensions to this – particularly there is an added *poignancy* at the time of Autumn for those of us who live in the Northern hemisphere.

The month begins with the great feast of All Saints – a time when we think about our own calling and those through the ages with whom we have shared that calling. Almost immediately, the mood changes with All Souls' day on the second of the month. A time characterised by a blend of solemnity and joy as we offer our thanks as well as our prayers for our sisters and brothers who have departed this life – of our own families and our friends as well as all those who have influenced us and our world. It's the one occasion in the year when we make a special effort to pray for them, in whatever particular needs that they now have, and as we do so we express our faith that death is the gateway to a new kind of life of which for now we have a foretaste in the shape of Christ's own resurrection from the dead.

Equally solemn are our commemorations around Armistice Day, November 11, when on that day and on the Sunday nearest we remember the horrific loss of life our world has known through the sin that leads to war. Alas we still see carnage on a massive scale in our world, and all that horror leads towards expressed in terms of civilian displacement. At the very moment I write this, millions of people are under threat in Iraq, in Syria, in the Yemen, and in Sudan. Oppressed people have to be liberated, rightful government has to be restored and respected, and clearly this means in a fallen world such as ours military conflicts. But in some places it is very difficult to draw neat lines between oppressor and oppressed, something which is further complicated by the imposition of ideas of Western democratic structures in places where at best such ideas are meaningless and at worst the source of further conflict.

*Remembering* in a Christian context is not just some psychological wringing-of-the-hands. When we *remember* in the Eucharist, for example, we are bringing a new kind of reality into the present. We are actively engaged here and now with the eternal energy of God for whose

ultimate reign we pray and wait in hope. *Waiting* can seem a pretty futile, if not sterile, activity in our lives. An activity that is really a passivity – waiting for a bus, or for an appointment with a doctor just seems like a complete waste of time. *Waiting in hope* for God's rule to be ultimately established, something that is expressed in that phrase in the creed about *looking for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come*, is not at all passive. *Et expectatio* in the Latin phrase says something about a very real *activity*. The philosopher Wittgenstein wrote about this when he described what it was to *expect someone to come for tea between 4 and 4.30 p.m.* This *expectation* was not about some psychological state. It is translated into a state of being, a *readiness* – cups (and maybe even saucers in Wittgenstein's day!) would be put on a tray, biscuits laid out, sugar in a bowl, (Wittgenstein added a question about whether his visitor smoked, in which case an ash-tray and cigarettes would be put out – not P.C. any more!), and thus a *state of readiness* to welcome the visitor created.

As Christian people who *wait in hope for Christ's appearing in glory and God's ultimate reign to be established* we are to *make things ready*. Which includes the constant activity of *remembering*. Remembering the ultimate realities of life – the desperate cost of human sin in terms of lives lost or scarred. Remembering that human sin is an ever-present reality which we are obliged to fight. Remembering that there is a better way, open to us as the free gift of God in Christ. Remembering that way and making it a reality in our lives and the life of the world we share. For without constant and confident *remembrance* we very swiftly repeat those past mistakes and sins, and fail to engage with the *hope* that Christ lays before us.

Which is the hope of *true humanity* – humanity redeemed and shot through with God's glory, God's self-giving, self-emptying love. Which liberates the self from that self-centredness which is at the root of all sin – no matter where it is played out on the stage of the world. We do well, in this month of *remembrance*, to call this to mind, to remember the gospel with which we are entrusted. In doing so, we hold the light of true hope before our troubled world, a hope in which we may all be rightly confident.

*Alec Gordon*