

Knights of St Columba Requiem Mass
Saturday 13th November 2021
St Chad's Cathedral
Homily – Mgr Timothy Menezes

This month of November, and especially this weekend where we have just marked Armistice Day and tomorrow observe Remembrance Sunday, is a poignant one.

Whether it is a time to remember those especially close to us who have died – family, friends, fellow parishioners and today fellow Knights of St Columba or members of their families; or perhaps it is more remote from our personal experience of loss, but we are part of that sense of remembrance of our country for its fallen: it is important to remember.

In the context of those who have fought in wars and conflicts, it is important to remember sacrifice, that they are never to be seen as having died in vain.

For those closer to us, there is something of the life completed which will now forever be a name to those who did not meet them. And it is in our memories that we hold the person, their character, our associations with them and their influence on us. It is important to remember.

Something that has always fascinated me from year to year is the Review of the Year programmes that come at the turn of the year. In those programmes, you have a variety of reactions: the obvious headlines of the year that everybody expects; sometimes the events that happened during the past year that you remember but somehow thought happened longer ago than the past year. And there are events that are highlighted in these Review of the Year programmes that until they were mentioned again now, you had quite forgotten about.

It is important to remember.

It is important not to forget.

And isn't that one of our greatest fears in day to day life now: forgetting something important; doubting our memory recall; and, of course, acknowledging the illnesses that limit our memory and our brain's archive of the past.

It is remembering the past that gives meaning to the Reading of our Mass today, from the Old Testament Book of Wisdom:

It speaks of the God whose Spirit hovered over the void at Creation and oversaw all that was made and shaped, now becoming known again after the experience of the Exodus: the camp to which the Israelites escaped slavery at the hands of the Egyptians, the pathway through the Red Sea and a fertile land in which to discover a new way of life despite their initial misgivings.

In every generation, the goodness of God is made known to his people. It is never just *more of the same*, but we can see that where the hand of God is at work in our lives, there are patterns of his action which we come to recognise – as well as some of the more unfathomable moments that are beyond our capacity to understand.

In the gospel of St Luke, we are presented with prayer as an insistent plea to God – likened to nagging for something until we get it!

I wonder whether taking an image from everyday life is helpful here. It is quite common now to send or receive a text message on your phone and to expect a response by return. And if it does not come in seconds or even minutes; if – perish the thought – the response might not come until the next day, it is thought that something is wrong.

Isn't that the case with prayer? We see it less as an ongoing conversation with the God who made us and loves us, but a route to obtaining an answer now to a prayer that I need answering (and in the right way) today.

It is not to say that prayers cannot be answered swiftly.

But maybe if all of our prayers were answered as quickly as the desired text message, we would lose sight of the wonder of it and just come to expect it.

The Knights of St Columba and all of its charitable outreach, and service of God and his Church, begins with and is rooted in prayer.

I wonder whether you have heard of a project called the Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer – a huge structure that is going to be built in Coleshill, not far from here, in late 2022.

And if you have heard of it, I wonder you have had the opportunity to send in any answered prayers which can form part of the national ecumenical picture of the power of God to work in our lives at any time, but perhaps especially the past half century.

To express faith in God through prayers that have been answered is not presumptuous. It is exactly the sentiment expressed in today's psalm: *Remember the wonders the Lord has done; tell all his wonderful works! Be proud of his holy name.*

The whole basis for our prayer today is that we have known answers to prayer before. And even if at times our communication with God becomes awkward or if we want to express our displeasure with God for the way things have gone, that is still a form of communication, and we are better to be in a relationship of communication with God than without.

As we gather to commend to the Lord those who have died, especially those of the past year, we do so as a people of prayer, a people who have cause to be thankful, a pilgrim people on a journey.

We hold before the Lord all those who have known real struggle over the past year – in the context of sickness, death and bereavement, as a result of the pandemic. Most of all we pray for the gift of hope for God's children still here on earth as we profess our hope in the resurrection of the dead who share in a particular way in the suffering and death of Jesus, so as to have a share in his glory.

May the Knights of St Columba who have served God and his people faithfully, now receive the reward of eternal life. May God be close to those who mourn. And as we remember the wonders of the Lord – especially through our memories of those who have died and await the Resurrection – may our witness to the goodness of God through answered prayer and our well-deserved hope, pave our own way to God, for that reunion with those who have died, in the fullness of joy, in God's good time.