Father Cantalamessa on Memory

Pontifical Household Preacher Comments on Sunday's Readings

ROME, JUNE 8, 2007 (Zenit.org).- Here is a translation of a commentary by the Pontifical Household preacher, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, on the readings from this Sunday's liturgy.

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Do This in Memory of Me
Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
Genesis 14:18-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Luke 9:11b-17

In the second reading of this feast, St. Paul presents us with the most ancient account we have of the institution of the Eucharist, written no more than about 20 years after the fact. Let us try to find something new in the Eucharistic mystery, using the concept of memorial: "Do this in memory of me."

Memory is one of the most mysterious and greatest powers of the human spirit. Everything seen, heard and done from early childhood is conserved in this immense womb, ready to reawaken and to dance into the light either by an external stimulus or by our own will.

Without memory we will cease to be ourselves, we will lose our identity. Those who are struck by total amnesia, wander lost on the streets, without knowing their own name or where they live.

A memory, once it has come to mind, has the power to catalyze our whole interior world and route everything toward its object, especially if this is not a thing or a fact, but a living person.

When a mother remembers her child, who was born a few days ago and is left at home, everything inside her flies toward her baby, a movement of tenderness rises from her maternal depths and perhaps brings tears to her eyes.

Not just the individual has memory; human groups -- family, tribe, nation -- also have a collective memory. The wealth of a people is not so much measured by the reserves of gold it holds in its vaults, but rather by how many memories it holds in its collective consciousness. It is the sharing of many memories that cements the unity of a group. To keep such memories alive, they are linked to a place, to a holiday.

Americans have Memorial Day, the day in which they remember those who fell in all the wars; the Indians have the Gandhi Memorial, a green park in New Delhi that is supposed to remind the nation who he was and what he did. We Italians also have our memorials: The civil holidays recall the most important events in our recent history, and streets, piazzas and airports are dedicated to our most eminent people.

This very rich human background in regard to memory should help us better understand what the Eucharist is for the Christian people. It is a memorial because it recalls the event to which all of humanity now owes its

existence as redeemed humanity: the death of the Lord.

But the Eucharist has something that distinguishes it from every other memorial. It is memorial and presence together, even if hidden under the signs of bread and wine. Memorial Day cannot bring those who have fallen back to life; the Gandhi Memorial cannot make Gandhi alive again. In a sense, the Eucharistic memorial, however, according to the faith of Christians, does do this in regard to Christ.

But together with all the beautiful things that we have said about memory, we must mention a danger that is inherent to it. Memory can be easily transformed into sterile and paralyzing nostalgia. This happens when a person becomes the prisoner of his own memories and ends up living in the past.

Indeed, the Eucharistic memorial does not pertain to this type of memory. On the contrary, it projects us forward; after the consecration the people say: "We proclaim your death, O Lord, and confess your resurrection, until you come."

An antiphon attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas ("O sacrum convivium") defines the Eucharist as the sacred feast in which "Christ is received, the memory of his passion is celebrated, the soul is filled with grace, and we are given the pledge of future glory."

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