

Remembering: Reminiscence, Nostalgia, *Anemnesis*

November is an appropriate time for remembering. As the leaves on the trees become fewer and fewer, we look back on the days of spring when their flowers filled the air with their scent, or on the days of summer when now-bare branches were bedecked in green leaves. As the morning fog lingers in the chill, we yearn for the bright sun which warmed our summer days – except here in Paris, of course, where it did nothing but rain! There is a tradeoff, however: as we look wistfully upon the now-barren fields and remember the past greenery of growing and ripening vegetables and fruits, we can nonetheless rejoice that our storage bins are now filled with the harvested produce.

The calendar of November festivals likewise encourages us to remember. In formerly Roman Catholic France, the vestigial feast of All Souls on November 2nd still beckons believers and unbelievers alike to cemeteries to remember their deceased relatives and friends. November 11th (or the closest long weekend as determined by Congress) signals another time of remembrance on both sides of the Atlantic: the end of “the war to end all wars” did not, alas, bring about a lasting peace, yet it gives us an opportunity to remember those who gave their lives in the vain hope that humanity would finally come to its senses and build the peace of which the angels sang at Bethlehem. The feast of St. Josaphat and the *Holodomor* commemorations beckon us to remember where we have been as Ukrainian Catholic Church and as a growing “Ukrainian” family – no matter where our ancestors came from; may we be open to the healing of those memories! The fourth Thursday of the month sees people clogging the interstate highways of the United States, sometimes dodging early snowstorms, in order to come together to spend Thanksgiving with family and friends – often with an empty chair and a hole in their hearts left by the departure of a loved one. (I purposely leave out election day since, as clergy, I am supposed to keep my voting to myself. Don't get me started on fundamentalist preachers who totally disregard this policy! Needless to say, however, some incumbents will be doing a lot of remembering after the election; believe me, I have my list of those candidates whose remembering I hope voters will encourage! Harumpf!)

Remembering often takes the form of nostalgia. Somewhere in our past there existed a “Camelot” - a now-disappeared Golden Age for which we long. According to a Puerto Rican friend, this is how other Hispanics see the Cubans, who reminisce about how “it was” - referring obviously to happier days before the arrival of Castro. That's the way it was in the mid-20th century in the “Greek Catholic” parish where I grew up, except that people around me reminisced over the way life had been in pre-World-War-II Ukraine, including Romanized 19th-century Galician spirituality. When I used to go downstairs to my grandparents' flat at supertime, my uncle would always be listening to “Big Band” music which, even in the mid 50's, was fast going out of style; having become nostalgic for my own foolish youth, I have been known to listen to oldies stations which play music familiar to “my” generation – namely, the 60's & 70's. The internet provides new outlets for my nostalgia, as I now frequent a page where I and hundreds of perfect strangers reminisce over the faded glory of my once-prosperous home town. Sigh! How do you get your fix? (Think of the song which opened every episode of the sitcom *All in the Family*: “Those were the days...”)

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Nostalgia is especially prevalent in times like ours when hardship stares so many in the face – be this hardship physical or economic or social or environmental or political or existential or ... feel free to fill in your own blank. Do you think that nostalgia might just be a means of escape, a way of getting away from the overpowering unpleasantness of reality? I am reminded of the scene from *Le petit prince* by Antoine de St-Exupéry where the little prince arrived on the planet of a drunkard who, as he claimed, 1/ drank to forget, 2/ to forget that he was ashamed, and 3/ was ashamed that he drank. In other words, avoidance is not helpful, and nostalgia may not be either.

During the Divine Liturgy, as part of the *Anaphora* – i.e. Eucharistic Prayer – there is what is called the *Anamnesis* – i.e., “remembering”. The celebrant silently prays “remembering ... all that was done for us: the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming.” Obviously, there is no avoidance going on here: the cross and the tomb hit us right between the eyes! However, we don't get mired in Good Friday to wallow in a Holy Saturday of self-pity; rather, we are led through the trials to triumph: Easter, Ascension, and beyond. With the help of the God who alone can heal memories, may our remembrance do the same for us!