

March 10, 2019 Amnesia Homily: In 1926, one of England's most celebrated literary figures, Agatha Christie, the doyenne of mystery writers, disappeared without a trace for eleven days. Her sudden absence was a newsworthy item and caused a sensation in media outlets around the world. Fearing the worst, her own family expected to learn of her tragic death sometime in the near future. Quite unexpectedly, she was eventually discovered two hundred miles away from where her abandoned car had been found. How did the investigators account for her disappearance? Mrs. Christie suffered from a complete loss of memory. She was afflicted with a temporary case of amnesia. How terrifying must have been her ordeal. Not only had she lost her identity and knowledge of her past history, she, in addition, could not even identify by name members of her own immediate family, who were available to offer her valuable assistance in recovering so much of what she had lost. Her mind was a blank!

Amnesia, a medical malady, is a matter for a neurologist. Advances in medicine have made it possible to cure the one afflicted with the disease. There are other forms of amnesia that are not so easily recognizable. Consider the case of the spiritual amnesiac. His identity as a Christian has vanished, God is forgotten in his daily life and he has no clear sense of direction. He wanders about aimlessly through life. His amnesia is very often willful. He is partly, if not entirely, to blame for his loss of memory. Only one remedy, a surefire remedy, is available to him. He must recover his memory by a conscious decision to once again return to the Lord and to follow the path chosen for him to salvation. Divine assistance is required!

In his highly acclaimed Nobel Prize winning address, the humanitarian and concentration camp survivor, Elie Weisel, a Jew, declared that to be a Jew is to remember. Indeed, Professor Weisel made it his life's mission to keep alive the memory of the holocaust. The world, in his view, must never forget man's inhumanity, his cruelty, to his neighbor. On the other hand, Weisel maintains that "the rejection of memory is a curse".

In the 26th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses insists the Jew must never forget what God has done for him. "Moses spoke to the people, saying "The priest shall receive the basket from you and shall set it in front of the altar of the Lord, your God". (Deut.26:4) After he arrived in the Promised Land, every Jew had a solemn duty to offer the first fruits of the harvest to a priest of the temple. It was thought an appropriate way to express gratitude for the great deeds performed by God. After surrendering the first fruits, the Jew then professes his faith publicly. In a nutshell, he offers a brief summary of salvation history: How God had liberated the Chosen People from their bondage in Egypt and how He established them in the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey". (Deut.26:10)

Evidence abounds that we suffer from a collective amnesia in our own day. When our legislators enact laws approving of infanticide, we suffer from a massive loss of memory of God as the author of life.

When migrants are treated disrespectfully as invaders or intruders, we have lost the moral sense of right and wrong and conveniently forget that they are our brothers and sisters, who are in need, and are often desperate for a more humane life, especially for their children.

When mass attendance declines in staggering numbers, the Sabbath day is trivialized and God is forgotten; and

When family life is on the verge of total collapse, we show that we are forgetful that the Father of the human family and the author of marriage is God Himself, who is always faithful and true to his people and never ceases to care for them in their struggles.

The penitential season of Lent is an opportune time to recover our memory, our Christian memory. The many distractions in our life may make it very difficult to focus on the truths of our faith and act accordingly. So let us pause and reflect on God's many blessings and our secular culture's anemic response. Help us remember, Lord!

Amen!