

THE ANAMNESIS*

“REMEMBRANCE” IN THE EUCHARIST

By Rodolph Yanney

- “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24).
- “I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore (Rev 1: 17,18).
- “You do proclaim my death, confess my resurrection and remember me until I come.” (Liturgy of St. Basil).
- “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever” (Exodus 12:14).

As we stand before God in the Eucharist, recalling all his mercies and thanking him for his blessings, we discover that all our thanks have crystallized around salvation. The Eucharistic Prayer then moves imperceptibly from thanksgiving to the “remembrance” of salvation history. It is not a coincidence that this pattern is found in all liturgies, in all churches and in all ages. It is the fulfillment of the Lord’s command, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

It is essential that we start by clarifying the meaning of the Greek word *anamnesis*, which is translated into the English word “remembrance.” Other languages have also failed to give the sense of the original Greek term. “Words like “remembrance” and “memorial” have for us a connotation of something, itself absent, that are only mentally recollected. But in the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, *anamnesis* and its cognate verb have the sense of re-calling or re-presenting before God an event of the past so that it becomes *here and now operative by its effect* (Num. 5: 15; 1 Kings: 17, 18; Heb. 10: 3,4).¹ Kittel’s

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¹ Gregory Dix: *The Shape of the Liturgy*, London, 1945: 161.

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says, in reference to Christ’s order to the disciples at the Last Supper,

This was not merely in such sort that they simply remember, but rather, in accordance with the active sense of the anamnesis and the explanation in 1 Cor 11: 26, in such a way that they actively fulfill the anamnesis. The making present by the later community of the Lord who instituted the Supper, and who put the new covenant into effect by his death is the goal and content of their action in which they repeat what Jesus and his disciples did on the eve of his crucifixion.²

It is significant that none of the heresies that appeared in the early Christian centuries, when Greek was universally understood, denied the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Such teaching only appeared in the Middle Ages.

The closest example of the anamnesis in the Eucharist is the Jewish Passover. The Jews did not repeat the Passover; but rather, by doing what they did in the first one, they lived the same Passover, and experienced the salvation of God for his people, in spite of the fact that the exodus from Egypt was not repeated. Likewise, in the New Testament, God has saved us from the bondage of sin and death through his crucifixion and resurrection. However, we live anew the Mystery of Redemption, and experience it with all its blessings in every Eucharist.

Eucharist and Eternity:

As such, the anamnesis is not an easy task nor is it within human power. It is achieved because the salvation of God is an eternal event that transcends time and place. For “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8). For him past, present and future are one eternal time. In the Liturgy we live a moment of eternity and we behold the Son of Man during his earthly life. We also unite with him in his ascension and Second Coming. The contemporary Russian theologian Paul Evdokimov explains this:

The liturgical *memorial* actualises the before and after
The liturgy freeing us from the weight of time, a weight caused by its non-existent dimensions, brings the divine presence into a man’s soul and permits him to recognize it. It is

² Kittel G: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Tr. By Bromiley GW, Michigan, 1978. Vol. I: 349

because Mary Magdalene was looking for her God following an image fixed and stabilized in her, and therefore non-existent, that she did not at once recognize her Lord at the tomb.³

This shows us the reality of the Divine Liturgy and how different it is from any other event in our lives. Every event happens within time, but the Eucharist is beyond time. When Mary Magdalene looked at the Lord through her human eyes she mistook him for the gardener. We fall into the same error when we participate in the Eucharist with our human mind and emotions. It is impossible to behold the Lord in it if we are watching the hours and minutes we are in church, or if we let our eyes be distracted by anything that hinders our soul from being deeply absorbed in the Liturgy and ascending with it to the heavenly altar. A Spirit-filled person forgets all what is around him during the Eucharist. For him, the icons, hymns, prayers and all other material rites and symbols are only windows through which his soul can enter into Eternity. He does not feel whether he is still in the body or not, as Evdokimov says:

In his ascent, “the man in Christ” learns the liturgical meaning of history; it suppresses all turning aside and leads him to the hidden reality. . . . In the Apocalypse, the sole occupation of men is “to prostrate and adore.” This is because every doxology—Eucharist, thanksgiving—“redeems the time,” which means that it opens it upon “the eternal present.”

In Remembrance of Me

“Do this in remembrance of me.” The words of the Lord are clear. In the Eucharist we do not remember anything or any single action of Christ, it is rather the Lord himself, Emmanuel, the Incarnate God, who comes for our salvation. “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21-23). St. Athanasius, in his Discourse against the Aryans, says, “The Logos took flesh so that we may receive the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who completes the redemptive work of Christ, and makes communion with the Divinity available to everyone.” The anamnesis is the liturgical aspect for the participation of every believer in this salvation throughout all its stages.⁴

³ Paul Evdokimov: *The Struggle with God*. Paulist Press, NJ, 1966: 213.

⁴ The Catholic belief in the Middle Ages, based upon the Scholastic Theology, explained the importance of the Sacraments for salvation as means of Grace and as essential conditions added to the work of Christ for us. The teachings of the Fathers regarding the individual salvation as synergy between the work of God and the will of man places the mysteries in their correct role as an indispensable part in God’s economy for our salvation (*Patristic Teaching on Salvation*. In *Coptic Church Review*, vol. 16: 2, 1995: 50-56).

The liturgy recalls these stages in more than one place:

- “He took flesh, became man and taught us the means of salvation.”
- “As we commemorate His Holy Passion, His Resurrection from the dead, His Ascension into Heaven, His sitting at Thy Right Hand, O Father, and His second Parousia, coming from heaven that is dreadful and glorious”

(From the Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil)

Thus, the Eucharist is the anamnesis of three stages that express the Mystery of Christ (which are one constant moment for God and for the heavenly spirits). The Divine Liturgy illustrates these three stages of Salvation History:

First—The Mystery of Christ who came and suffered in the flesh: “He was incarnate and became man. . . . He gave Himself up for our salvation” (past tense).

Second—The Mystery or the Word who rose from the dead to remain with us forever: “He is risen from the dead” (present tense).

Third—the Hidden Mystery of the Lord’s Second Coming: “He instituted a day of retribution in which He will come” (future tense).

The Eucharist represents Salvation History from creation till the end of time. Limiting the Eucharist to one action or one stage has caused much harm for the Church throughout history. Since the Middle Ages to the middle of the 20th century, the Roman Catholic Church stressed the first meaning. “Sacrifice” became the most popular term used both for the Eucharist and for the Divine Liturgy. The Offering of the Sacrifice became the essential role of the Priest (even in the absence of the congregation and the absence of Communion). All meditations were centered upon the Crucified Christ and his Passion in the flesh. On the other hand, Protestants lived with a futuristic spirit, awaiting the Second Coming (third meaning). For them, therefore, the Mystery has been limited to Communion; and the anamnesis became a mental recall or “memorial,” as if it were only a monument for a dead person, not an action that leads to the Presence Of the One who is “alive for ever more” (Rev 1: 18), and who has promised to be “with us always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28: 20).

The Church Fathers did not do that. They did not separate between the death of the Lord and his Resurrection, or between Resurrection and Ascension, neither in the liturgical cycle nor in the Eucharist.⁵ God’s economy for the salvation

⁵ St. Athanasius describes Easter in his Paschal Letters as ‘the feast of the Crucified’.

of man is not subject to time, although it was revealed to us in time. The Liturgy of St. Basil declares in one sentence the threefold object of the anamnesis:

For as often as you eat of this bread and drink of this cup you do proclaim my death, confess my resurrection, and remember me until I come.

The Anamnesis and Our Participation in the Divine Liturgy

The anamnesis is not limited to one sentence or several separate segments of the Liturgy. The true understanding of this word and its entrance into the innermost depth of the soul make it able to see the living Christ in the one Eucharist, even though it is divided into six different actions or parts.⁶ In every Eucharist we are there, in the night when He was betrayed, at Calvary, standing at the foot of the Cross-with the Marys and the Beloved Disciple. At the same time we are present before the empty tomb on Resurrection Day; and in the Upper Room, we share his appearance to the disciples; and at the Mount of Olives we follow our Forerunner (Heb 6:20) who comes in every Eucharist to take us and sit us with him in heaven according to his promise (Jn 14:3; Eph 2:6). We are also at the moment of his Second Coming together with the Angels and Saints at the last trumpet.

Everything is brought together in the Eucharist. There is neither barrier nor difference between Heaven and earth. Both “are filled with Thine Holy Glory.” Past and future become one. The Cross, Resurrection, Ascension, and Second Coming are all blended in one eternal moment. The Church, which is subject to time, has reached eternity and become the Kingdom of God. God and man meet together. The Eucharist destroys all material barriers, as described by a contemporary theologian:

“The Sunday Eucharist of the Church in the time dimension of this world transcends the bond of time. It recalls the past events of Christ’s death and resurrection into the present, and at the same time realizes in the present the future consummation. The presence of the living Christ in the midst of his own assures the Church that it not only communes together on the level of this-world existence but is also seated with him in the heavenly places whence it judges the world (Lk 22:28- 30).”⁷

⁶ Since man is subject to time, one can only participate in (or study) the Eucharistic Liturgy by following, in sequence, its six aspects or meanings: thanksgiving, anamnesis, sacrifice, presence of God, intercession, and communion.

⁷ Massey Shepherd: *Christian Idea of Education*.

We conclude with the words of Evdokimov:

“Give us this day our daily bread”⁸ means that the gifts of salvation and of the Kingdom may be granted us even now, even today, here and below. It is not a hope for future time, but an immediate requirement, here and now. We enter Paradise today.⁹

⁸ It is clear to the reader that this segment of the Lord’s Prayer speaks about the Eucharist.

⁹ Evdokimov, *op. cit.*