

## Remembrance Sunday 2025: Gilling

One of the most tragic things in life is when someone loses their memory. Our memory forms us, it has an impact on who we are as individuals and as a society. If that is lost, the person becomes disengaged and disconnected from us and the world, and may become isolated, lonely and forgotten. They may lose their sense of value and fall into despair. It is a fear of all of us that we may no longer be remembered.

The Early Church Fathers spoke of memory as being ‘a power of the soul’. The great philosopher Aristotle referred to it as being the ‘scribe of the soul’, such is the importance of memory. Memory informs, rightly or wrongly, and influences our decision making and our behaviour. Memory connects us to people and events and enables us to ‘re-member’, reconnect, re-live. The poet Kahlil Gibran said, ‘remembrance is a form of greeting’.

This month of November is when we commemorate All Saints and All Souls and is a time when we recall with an act of remembrance those who have gone before us from this life and have left their mark on us, directly or indirectly, personally or collectively. It is good that we should have a season for remembrance as it is a time when we feel that the veil between time and eternity is thinner and we sense a connection with the greater and wider communion of saints of which we are a part. The Church settled this feast at the time of the turning of the year when the pre-Christian religions were accustomed to make offerings to and recall the dead. The Church keeps this custom but changed it to one of memorial and remembrance for the dead.

In his letter to the church at Thessalonica, St Paul speaks of remembering and giving thanks saying, ‘we always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayer. We continually remember you before God.’

Why then does remembering matter? Why did it matter to St Paul that his people are remembered? Why does it matter to people today that we remember the sacrifice of those who have served and died in wars and conflicts? It matters because remembering connects us to them individually and collectively. By remembering them we realise who we are, where we come from, as we recall friends, family and community.

On a spiritual level, when we experience isolation and despair, it can feel that God has forgotten us and that we have been abandoned. Even Jesus on the cross cried out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' This heartfelt cry speaks of the deep human fear of being forgotten which found one of its greatest expressions in the trenches of the First World War, and for many since who have known the horror and loneliness of conflict. The prophet Isaiah speaks into this space, 'I will not forget you, says the Lord. See I have engraved your name on the palms of my hands.' Here amid desolation, it is being remembered which gives us back our humanity and the assurance that we are not forgotten and we matter.

It is the assurance of being remembered that takes us from despair to courage even in the most desperate and hopeless situations, as G.K.Chesterton put it, 'Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die.' This readiness can only come from love, as John tells us, 'Greater love hath no one than this, that they lay down their life for their friends.' Remembering matters because it is a human action that gives us value and purpose. God tells us that remembering is also a divine action that shows His love to every human being and the whole creation and He promises He never forgets any of us. Because of His remembering of us, we are given courage and hope.

So today is again our opportunity to remember, to grieve for friends and family collectively who fell and laid down their lives for love. Today we remember them, they are not forgotten, and we give thanks for their eternal worth both to us and to God. Amen.

