

**Sermon preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia on Sunday May 25th 2008 by the
Reverend Alan Neale
“Remember Me?”**

The Bishop was well loved but he was no preacher and he suffered from a poor memory. He found no way to improve his memory but his preaching he tried to improve by using anecdotes and phrases from other preachers. One vacation, he sat listening to a moderately good sermon given by a young preacher. His mind started to wander but was immediately called to attention when the preacher said, “The best years of my life were spent in the arms of another man’s wife”... silence... “My mother!”... ah, relief! Returning to his pulpit our amnesiac prelate decided to use the same attention-grabbing phrase, “The best years of my life were spent in the arms of another man’s wife”... silence... silence... “I just cannot remember her name at the moment”.

Dale Carnegie writes, ““A person's name is to him or her the sweetest and most important sound in any language.” And, perhaps, one of the most socially unsettling questions is posed when we are faced by a person that we are sure we know... somehow... somewhere and they ask, “Do you remember me?”.

On the internet there are pages and pages and pages of sites telling readers how to remember names... some methods of course are by word association which can rather awkward if you call the person by the associated word rather than their name!

Most of us want to be able to remember people but all of us want to be remembered and, therefore, to be forgotten is one of primal fears of all men and women.

On this Memorial Day Weekend we are called to remember those have died for their country, to remember those who suffer and those who mourn, to remember the causes of freedom and righteousness. Laurence Binyon’s poem “For the Fallen” contain these famous words... “They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old. Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them”. We will remember them... and the dead, the suffering and the bereaved plead with us, “Remember me”.

Most of us want to be able to remember people but all of us want to be remembered and, therefore, to be forgotten is one of primal fears of all men and women.

Isaiah 49: 14 “But Zion says, ‘The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me’”. Or as the Message translation reads “But Zion says, "I don't get it. God has left me. My Master has forgotten I even exist”.

To be recognized, to know that we are remembered strengthens and nourishes our lives; to be continually overlooked, neglected, have our names and ourselves forgotten that becomes, in time, debilitating, frustrating and wearisome.

St. Paul was confident that the Lord knew his name and therefore he could act with courage, dignity and integrity before the vacillating, sometimes childish, antics of the Corinthian church. Ultimately he did not crave their recognition, their remembrance... he writes to them, “It is the Lord who judges me”... it is the Lord who knows me, who remembers me!

In today’s Gospel Jesus speaks about worry and faith... we will worry, we will fret, we will be anxious when we doubt that God remembers us... whom we truly are... what we deeply need. But... we will be liberated from anxiety (or, at least, increasingly freed from anxiety) when we grow in faith that God, our Father, continually remembers whom we are and what we need. The co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous writes, “He is the Father and we are his children... This concept is the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom”... alleluia!

Despite all the powerful, beautiful, abundance promises which are described in today's reading from Isaiah – "I will say to the prisoners, 'Come out', to those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves'... they shall feed... they shall not hunger or thirst" – despite these and many more glorious promises, the people of Zion still mournfully wail, "My Lord has forgotten me!".

The people of Zion then, and we the people of Zion today, need to be overwhelmed by, grasped by the sure conviction that we are not forgotten, that we are remembered by God. Listen to these words, Isaiah 49: 16, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands".

Even though the minister who married you, or the one who baptized your children, even though such a one may forget you. "yet" says the Lord, "I will not forget you".

If only there were time now, it would be so good for our souls and beautiful for our lives if we could sit and reflect upon this glorious truth "I will not forget you says the Lord", bask in the warm sunlight of this eternal promise "I will not forget you says the Lord", submerge ourselves in the renewing waters of this profound reality "I will not forget you says the Lord".

"See" he says "I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands".

You know, in all the web pages of "How To Remember Names" that I scanned I read nothing approaching the profundity of Isaiah's words in enabling us to remember names.

You want to remember names... consider afresh Isaiah 49:16 "I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands".

Continual Reference and Personal Sacrifice are the key. Continual Reference... when we think and pray of someone often, we will remember their names. Personal Sacrifice... when we have somehow given of ourselves to another person, even to our own cost, we will remember their names.

Continual Reference and Personal Sacrifice... friends, this is how our God relates to us, this is why he says, "I will not forget you".

At all times we are in the mind of God (as the writer to the Hebrews says of Christ, "He ever lives to make intercession for us") and He has (and He does) give of his very self that we might live and be free ("Christ died for us").

So... you want to avoid the embarrassment of awkward silence when asked, "Do you remember me?"... you want to remember names trying praying for others, especially new people, regularly and be ready to give of yourselves to others...

It will work... it has worked for God for a long, long, long time indeed... thanks be to God, alleluia!