In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We all like to be remembered.

In days gone by the rich and the famous made sure that succeeding generations remembered them by erecting great public buildings, having parks or even towns named after themselves, or by having their likeness sculptured or their portraits painted.

With few exceptions, such efforts at immortality were largely in vain, and few if any remember the name of a face in a painting, or the story behind a name on a monument – or if they do, it is probably because the statute is about to be pulled down and the person commemorated ‘cancelled’.

Every time I go to a cemetery, or a parish church filled with monuments to the long dead, what strikes me most is not how well-remembered people are, years after their death, but how quickly they have been forgotten! Tombstones toppled or defaced, crosses and angels broken and overgrown! Flowers wilted and withered-up; incised names and dates partly, if not completely, illegible.

*Vanity, vanity, all is vanity*, says the preacher; *dust we are and to dust shall we return*: powerful and evocative words, summing up the fate of all-too mortal humanity.
This weekend, indeed throughout the month of November, our minds are focused on remembering: on All Saints Day it was recalling that *innumerable cloud of witnesses* who have passed deeper into God’s glorious light and inextinguishable life; on All Souls’ Day, it was our dead loved ones and friends, as they end their pilgrimage here on earth and journey homeward ever deeper into the source of their being.

Today, it is the young men of the Somme and Ypres, the dead of Coventry and London and Dresden; the men of SHEFFIELD and SIR GALAHAD; of Baghdad and Kandahar and Helmand, and from all the other acts of war and terror perpetrated since 1945.

We go on remembering, *at the going down of the sun and in the morning*: that is our promise. But why? Surely, such events are better forgotten, at very best allowed to fade away, sink back into the sands of time or the deep icy waters of the South Atlantic, until there is nothing left to remember?

But we go on remembering precisely because it is so easy to forget! Toppling a statue in Bristol, removing a memorial plaque from the wall of a cathedral or a parish church, is a lazy way of dealing with the past. But if we fail to deal well with the past, we jeopardise not only our present, but the future that will belong to our children and grandchildren and our great grandchildren.

In his recent book, *Whatever happened to Tradition*, the author, Tim Stanley reminds his reader that society has become prey to the Enlightenment’s relentless dynamic thrust which prevents us from engaging well with the past, of being hoodwinked into thinking that looking back is unhealthy, that progress at any cost is best.
Recent years have witnessed a wholesale dumping of memory, a Bowdlerisation of history, removing any complex or difficult narrative in favour of a cleaned-up, sanitised re-telling of history.

Stanley calls for the past to be reclaimed, it really isn’t a foreign country where they do things differently, it can help us to navigate change by retaining a sense of who we are and where we have come from. Of course, we have to interrogate past errors, it would be obscene not to do so, but to ignore the past is sheer folly if we are to live well now and not repeat the of mistakes we have made.

Remembrance Sunday is an annual wake-up call that we have to deal with the past; it’s like a national large, knotted handkerchief in the country’s pocket, something that we cannot ignore.

Our minds and our imaginations are forced to return to the list of now almost-forgotten battlefields, to the long demolished bombed out shells of houses and churches of eighty years ago, to the rallies of Nurenbarg, to the deathly waters of Port Stanley and to the burning heat of the deserts of Iraq and Afghanistan and the smoldering twin towers of New York.

If, as children, we remember that fire is hot, we are safe for the rest of our lives; if we forget, then time and again, we will get our fingers burned or worse still.

As Christian men and women, we are, perhaps, above all others on this planet, most skilled in the art of remembering. We recall the names and remember the stories of saints and martyrs through the long ages of the Church's story; we remember to pray for our dead, Sunday by Sunday, year in and year out.
We remember these things because we have been commanded "to remember"vii, to remember to take and bless and share bread and wine so that we can, each time we do so, not just recall to mind, but enter into, become part of the life and death and resurrection of the One who gives meaning and direction not only to this planet but to all that ever has been, is now or ever shall be.

And Sunday by Sunday, day by day, the Church Universal, does this in remembrance of him, for herself, and for the world.

Our individual memories might fail, our collective memories may fail, societies might chose to forget, or try to wipe out the historical record because it is too uncomfortable or to complex or because it doesn’t chime with the priorities of a particular age or place; but until Jesus comes again, and the Kingdom is completed in and through him and time itself comes to an end, we will remember; we shall go on remembering, and as we remember, we shall continue to proclaim the greatest of all truths that our only hope, the world’s only hope, is found in the saving death and resurrection of the One who comes to us in bread and wine; he who is the world's true peace, its life, its hope, it’s love.

Amen.

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i Ecclesiastes 1.2
ii Genesis 3.19
iii Hebrews 12.1
iv Binyon, R. Laurence, For the Fallen, 1914
v Stanley, T., Whatever Happened to Tradition, 2021, Bloomsbury
vi Hartley, L. P., The Go-Between, 1953
vii Luke 22.19