

## Homily for the 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

For those of us older than 15 years of age, many of us remember what happened on September 11, 2001. For me, it was my first full week of classes at St. Vincent Seminary in Latrobe, less than 40 miles from where Flight 93 would go down in Shanksville later that day. At 10 am that morning, according to the eye witness of a local pilot, Flight 93 flew right over our heads in Latrobe. Bill Wright testified how he saw the plane's wings rocking, and the aircraft appeared to be in great distress. From subsequent information from the flight data recorder, we now know that the fight to wrest control from the terrorists onboard that plane began roughly over Latrobe.

Remembering is so important. Literally, to remember is "to be mindful of again." Of course we remember the four tragic flights and the 2,976 people who died in those terrorist attacks that day. But, do you also remember how things were afterwards? How packed the churches were? How people were helping out their neighbors in all sorts of ways? How they even talked about God on ESPN?

But sometimes we forget things we shouldn't forget – like appointments and birthdays. And how about anniversaries? Have you ever forgotten a wedding anniversary before? Remembering those is really important! But forgetting can also happen when it comes to our faith too – when it comes to the things of God. We can have what I call *spiritual amnesia*.

Spiritual amnesia is a real danger and a common problem that causes us to forget the most important realities in life – those eternal truths beyond the hum drum of everyday life. For example, we can so easily forget the importance of loving God above all else in our daily lives. And we can so easily put out of mind the importance of loving our neighbor as ourselves.

This spiritual amnesia is part of the reason Jesus told the beautiful parable we just heard – my favorite in the whole Bible. The younger son, as we heard, squandered his premature inheritance on a life of dissipation. Literally he was living ‘prodigally’ – a word which means “characterized by profuse or wasteful expenditure” – hence the Prodigal Son. And when he had freely spent everything, and a severe famine struck the land, we hear that “he came to his senses” and made the decision to go back home. He *remembered* how good he had it at home – enough food, adequate shelter, real love. It was this act of remembering during his time of extreme desperation that led him out of the hell his life had become.

Do you remember hearing that God loves you – that He loves you perfectly and eternally just as you are? It’s true. But, so often we forget that unconditional love shown to us by Jesus in His death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Again, God knows that we have this spiritual amnesia – just like the Israelites, who had seen God part the Red Sea and provided them manna in the desert, and yet abandoned Him to worship the golden calf; and just like Peter and the other Disciples, who had seen all of Jesus’ miracles, and yet abandoned Him in the hour of His Passion.

Therefore, our Father reminds us of His love for us at every Mass. Remember how at the Last Supper, after transforming the bread and wine into His Body and Blood to share with His disciples, Jesus said to them, “Do this in remembrance of me”? But when Jesus speaks of remembrance, He doesn’t just mean, “Have a nice thought about me when you repeat this some day.” Much more, He means, “recall what I did, and through my power, make it present again.” But, make what present again? That sacrifice which He would offer on the cross the very next day for the forgiveness of our sins. That’s what the Eucharist is about: we personally receive into our very beings the very Body and Blood of Jesus, given for our salvation. And we constantly need to be reminded, week in and week out, of this perfect act of love so that we don’t forget. He gave His life for us. And we remember and make present again His very words: “This is my Body, given up for you. Do this in memory of me.”

My friends, this is the power of remembering. Remembering isn’t just so that we don’t forget. Even more, remembering enables that which we remember to still have an effect in our lives today. So when we remember 9/11, we can become empowered again to bring the honor, the generosity, the kindness, the vigilance, and the patriotism, among other virtues, deeper into our lives again. And similarly, every time we celebrate Mass, and we gaze upon the consecrated bread and wine, we are again enabled by God’s grace to allow that love, mercy, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ more deeply into our lives today. Remember, “Never forget”! God bless you.