



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

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Dear friends and colleagues,

The Cenotaph in London was, of course, designed in 1920 by architect Edwin Lutyens, and it immediately became the focal point for the nation to express its grief and gratitude for those who died in the recent war.

Remembrance-tide will soon be here. The word “cenotaph” means literally “The Empty Tomb”.

Curiously, although the Cenotaph appears to the naked eye to have both vertical and horizontal lines in its construction, it actually has neither.

The vertical lines lean slightly towards each other, so that if you followed them upwards you would find that they all meet at a point about a thousand feet above the ground.

The supposedly horizontal lines which seem to run parallel with the ground are in fact slightly curved and they are all parts of a number of enormous circles whose centre would be a single point some nine hundred feet beneath the monument.

But the words “cenotaph” and “empty tomb” suggest something very significant to Christians like ourselves as we meet together not just on one Sunday in the year, but every Sunday. For the words “empty tomb” suggest to us a quite different Empty Tomb – the one in Jerusalem, several thousand miles from here. Moreover we are thinking not so much about the empty tomb itself but about the person who left it empty in the first place when He rose from the dead on the first Easter Day.

Christians have met together on the first day of every week ever since the first Easter, to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and to meet Him in the Holy Communion.

Contrast the respective messages of the two cenotaphs or empty tombs – the one in London and the one in Jerusalem. The one in Whitehall suggests to the secular mind “We’ll meet again, don’t know where, don’t know when.” The empty tomb in Jerusalem says to us “We’ll meet Him again, right here in church this very morning, and Sunday by Sunday, for as often as we ‘eat this bread and drink this cup’ we show forth the Lord’s atoning death till He comes again in glory.” In the Holy Communion we take part in His Sacrifice in the certain knowledge that, so far from that sacrifice having been made in vain, as the death of so many brave men in wartime sometimes seems to us, His death in fact is the one, true, pure immortal sacrifice of the Lamb of God, which takes away the sins of the world.

The two cenotaphs or empty tombs do have a common starting point. They both begin with one of the certain facts of life: the fact of death; but from their common beginning on this earth they immediately begin to diverge towards very different, and ultimately irreconcilable, conclusions, because what we call the “secular” mind always remains obstinately earthbound. It may indeed draw inspiration from the millions of those who fought and died in two world wars, and wars since, and such an inspiration may inspire in the secular mind a determination to make sure that their sacrifice should not have been useless.

But the Christian mind, as it rises Sunday by Sunday to meet our risen Lord in the Mass, is doing something very different from what the secular mind is doing. For it has an entirely different *focal point* on which to fix itself.

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Autumn: a time of change

Autumn is a time of transformation. We can see this all around us in nature in the autumnal colours and the freshness of the air and changing light. But it can also be a time of taking in the freshness which hopefully and symbolically brings a greater clarity to our thoughts and ideas.

As with any kind of transition, this change can sometimes make us sad. Understandably, most people would like the long, light summer evenings and the feeling of warmth on our skin (not too hot though!) to continue. We may not be psychologically ready to pack away our summer clothes or put the camping equipment in the garage or attic for yet another year! But just as nature does, it is important that we change with the seasons too.

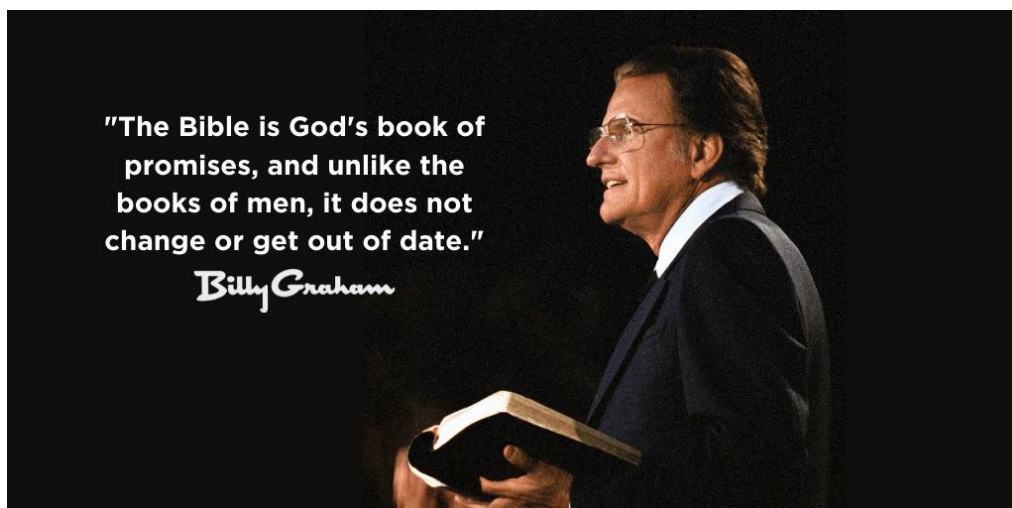
In nature, the survival of trees during the cold winter months followed by their transformation in the spring is only possible through this process of change. Leaves drop and precious sap, that nourished leaves during the spring and summer, is withdrawn to its roots to sustain the strength, and continued growth of the tree.

Just as the falling leaves lay bare the tree, emotions that may have been covered over or pushed aside during the light summer months are likely to be more strongly felt with the shorter, darker days. And they need to be acknowledged.

In Chinese lore it is said that “falling leaves are a reflection of sighs of grief and melancholy that autumn brings when all dies back to the ground”. If we look at this positively and constructively follow that impulse to withdraw to take stock, then we give ourselves time to process what we may have lost, which could help prevent depression from settling in during the dark winter months.

While many love the change, some people say that that they find autumn more difficult to cope with than summer and winter. You don't know quite what to expect. Autumn can be very fickle! Autumn reminds us that things are changeable – nothing is permanent in this world. But with God's help we can accept and perhaps embrace the changes that we are unable to prevent.

The only thing that we can rely on to never change is the permanence of God's love. As the closing prayer in the Office of Compline says: “so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this fleeting world, may repose upon thy eternal changelessness.”



(My "desk picture" on the front page shows an Isle of Sheppey scene viewed from my desk, or from the garden, or within a few minutes of it.)