Letter from your Reader Graham

Each of my immediate family, that is wife and three daughters and myself own a blanket that is comprised of a number of coloured woollen squares sewn together to form the one. Whenever we pick our blanket up to use, they become a sacrament to my late mother for it was she that knitted all the squares and put these blankets together. They become to us a reminder of her love, her laughter, her busy hands, her life. A look at the blanket makes us smile and be thankful.

Doubtless you will have your own sacraments to those no longer with us, the smell of his tobacco, or her perfume, or sitting on the bench that they used to love sitting on. Sacramental moments, that take us out of our humdrum lives of anxiety and care, to remind us of a friendship, a love, a life that was so meaningful and enriching to us at the time and continues to be so even now. It is not just a memory of how things were or happy times, it makes us thankful and becomes an inspiration and strength to move on in our own lives.

The sacrament of the Eucharist in Christian tradition and experience comes through a small piece of bread and a sip of wine. It may seem strange but that is all it takes to remember God, to focus once more on God, to reconnect with God through the reminder of His love and forgiving Grace. It draws attention once more to the Cross and what the Cross represents in their faith journey. It brings renewed hope in the Christian walk, renewed assurance of God’s unconditional love, renewed strength to try and be the person He would have us be.

But sacrament is defined as an outward sign of an inward grace and should not be restricted to the religious connotation, administered by priests in solemn ceremonies. We should remember that God lurks in the whole universe, every person, every creature, every moment in time, every human experience. God is present around us like fresh air. All that is necessary is to wake up to that presence to become aware of it. That sacramental reminder of love and hope can be a smell, a piece of music, an old joke, a photograph, even a knitted blanket.

November has become a month of remembering, ushered in by All Souls, passed on through Guy Fawkes, culminating in the Remembrance Day commemorations for those who lost their lives through war down the years. Once more there will be an opportunity for us as the living to bring to mind the selflessness and sacrifice of those that gave their lives, as well as the sadness of those innocents, in the wrong place at the wrong time. Those who gather around memorials at those Commemoration Services will hear the sacrament of the names read out or see them inscribed on the memorial, and will be given that sacramental moment of memory and thanksgiving during the 2 minute silence and the playing of the last post. It will be poignant, there will be sadness, but it will be inspiring as well. With that inspiration there should come the determination and boldness to make things right in the world we live.

Graham Downes