

## On Memory

A good friend's passing after suffering from dementia for some years and another long-time friend's being in the last stages of Alzheimer's caused me to think about memory.

*Do this as a remembrance of me.* (Luke 22:19)

That evening before what we call Good Friday, Jesus knew this was the last time he would be with his closest friends. His friends may have suspected it but really could not imagine the events of the coming days. Jesus used the occasion to invoke one of the most mysterious of human faculties, memory.

Memory is not bound by time. It transports us back and forth between the past and present. with the same ease as the companion side of the human spirit, imagination, that brings us to what is yet to be. Memory is not bound by space, bringing to life places, people, and events in a way as real as if we were there. Sounds, smells, and sensations are resurrected and made present. Jesus wanted those closest to him to use this powerful human capability to summon the rich and life-changing experience of being with Jesus as they began to tell others about him and to live life as Jesus would live.

So much is transmitted through memory. Sadly, some of the content of memory is terrifying. People are plagued by trauma and cruel experiences that still haunt them. But memory also renews experiences characterized by what is traditionally named as the fruits of the Spirit, essentials such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and generosity. (Galatians 5:22).

It is an inevitable result of memory diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's that the memories of the surviving family and friends are also diminished. The pain and struggle of the last years of the diseases hide most of the loved one's life and dominate survivors' memories. Those left behind forget the whole of the person's life. Jesus' directive given at that last meal pushes those left behind to release the capacity of memory so that the fullness of the loved one's life is made real again. The graces that flowed through the one who has gone have an eternal quality and continue to enrich, akin to the saying from the Jewish tradition, which was Jesus' tradition, "May her/his memory be a blessing."