



In the “old days” when I was growing up in the Episcopal Church I never heard the word “anamnesis.” What exactly does it mean, and why is it used so much now?

Anamnesis is a word that is used in the original Greek New Testament and the earliest Christian liturgies, and thus is very important in understanding what Our Lord actually said as well as understanding Catholic Sacramental Theology and Liturgical Theology. The highly respected U.S. Lutheran liturgical scholar the Rev. Dr Frank C. Senn has written, “This Greek word is practically untranslatable in English. ‘Memorial,’ ‘commemoration,’ ‘remembrance’ all suggest a recollection of the past, whereas *anamnesis* means making present an object or person from the past. Sometimes the term ‘reactualization’ has been used to indicate the force of *anamnesis*.”

In other words, when we see the English words “remembrance,” “memorial,” “recalling” in the New Testament, in the liturgy, or in Sacramental and Liturgical Theology, they are deceptively inadequate translations of the original Greek word *anamnesis* (making actually present again; reactualizing) which was used to record what Jesus Christ Himself said at the Last Supper.

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in *anamnesis* of me.” (St Luke 22.19)

...the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in *anamnesis* of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in *anamnesis* of me.” (I Corinthians 11.23-25)

One reason *anamnesis* is used so much now is that since the Second Vatican Council and the liturgical renewal of the 1960’s and 1970’s Catholic Christians have been getting back behind the polarizing reactionary polemics of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation to the words and teaching of Our Lord Himself, the Apostles, and the Early Christian (Patristic) Church.

Anamnesis is found throughout the Book of Common Prayer (1979):

Collect for Corpus Christi (BCP pages 201, 252, 834)

...our Lord Jesus Christ in a wonderful Sacrament has left us a *making present again* of his passion....

Eucharistic Exhortation (BCP page 316)

Our Savior Christ...instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood as a sign and pledge of his love, for the continual *making present again* of the sacrifice of his death....

All Eucharistic Prayers

This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the *making present again* of me.

This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Whenever you drink it, do this for the *making present again* of me.

Eucharistic Prayer: Cranmerian Canon (BCP page 335)

...didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross...and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual *making present again* of that his precious death and sacrifice....

...do celebrate and make here before thy divine Majesty, with these thy holy gifts, which we now offer unto thee, the *reactualization* thy Son hath commanded us to make; having the *making present again* of his blessed passion and precious death, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension....

Eucharistic Prayer A (BCP page 363)

We celebrate the *reactualization* of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. *Making present again* his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Eucharistic Prayer B: Acclamation (BCP page 368)

We *make present again* his death, We proclaim his resurrection, We await his coming in glory.

Eucharistic Prayer C (BCP page 371)

Making present again his work of redemption, and offering to you this sacrifice of thanksgiving, we celebrate his death and resurrection as we await the day of his coming.

Eucharistic Prayer D (BCP page 374)

Father, we now celebrate this *reactualization* of our redemption. *Making present again* Christ's death and his descent among the dead, proclaiming his resurrection and ascension to your right hand....

Catechism: The Holy Eucharist (BCP page 859)

The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament commanded by Christ for the continual *making present again* of his life, death, and resurrection, until his coming again. ...the Eucharist...is the way by which the sacrifice of Christ is made present, and in which he unites us to his one offering of himself.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2ND Edition, page 287) puts it, "Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualizes them, makes them present. The Paschal [Triduum] mystery of Christ is celebrated, not repeated, and in each celebration there is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that makes the unique mystery present."

This excellent summary of the historic Catholic Faith goes on to say (page 343ff) "When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present. ... In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which is 'poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.' The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it *re-presents* (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross.... The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*."

The distinguished 20th century English liturgist the Very Rev. Msgr J.D. Crichton wrote: "Objectively, the sacrifice of Christ by which he took away the sin of the world is the cause of all Christian rejoicing and 'eucharist' [thanksgiving]; subjectively, here in the Mass he makes his self-offering available to the offerers and they, thus being united with him, give thanks for the 'work of redemption' that is taking place within them. *Anamnesis*, offering, and thanksgiving all go together. In the presence of Christ's offering, however, we have 'to learn to offer' ourselves so that through him our Mediator we may be drawn day by day into an ever more perfect union with God and with each other."