

Remembrance 2022

Let us Pray: O God Of Earth And Altar, Bow Down And Hear Our Cry,
Our Earthly Rulers Falter, Our People Drift And Die;
The Walls Of Gold Entomb Us, The Swords Of Scorn Divide;
Take Not Thy Thunder From Us, But Take Away Our Pride.’ Amen.
(*G.K. Chesterton*)

It is always such a privilege to be with you on this day each year, as we come together to remember by name those of this parish who gave their lives during the World Wars. But this year, a year in which we have seen the largest country in Europe invaded by a brutal and aggressive foreign force, we come with hearts more heavy than we have perhaps known them to be for a very long time.

At the conclusion of the 2nd World War, the world was inspired by a new hope that the tyranny and oppression that was so prominent in some circles leading up to and during that conflict, would no longer drive humanity into such darkness. At the end of the 2nd World War there was hope that we would never again see such large scale aggression, selfish ambition, torture and murder. Today, however, we are reminded how the anger, greed, bitterness, hatred and fear that dominated the 1930’s and 40’s has not yet been driven from human hearts.

Since the end of the 2nd World War there have been over 132 major conflicts – averaging 2 every year. Goodness does not fight just one foe

– evil is not located in one nation or ethnic group or political system or religious belief structure. To put it simply, evil exists where mercy, understanding, compassion and love are all lacking. Evil exists where human dignity is not upheld and mercy is not exercised.

As well as remembering the great sacrifices made in the 1st and 2nd World Wars, Remembrance Day in the 21st century also remembers sacrifices made in Suiz, Korea, The Falklands, Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone, The Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Palestine, Ukraine... The list is so very long.

We seem to get so much of it on our television screens and our social media feeds that we can become desensitised to it. But we must never allow the horrors of warfare to lead us into apathy. Even now, 8 months on, I watch the reports coming out of Ukraine and my heart explodes with grief. I know yours does to.

Sometimes people say to me in desperation: if there is a God why does he allow war and suffering? It is a valuable question. But it's a question which solicits but one response. Why do we allow war and suffering?

It's rather hypocritical, don't you think, to project onto God the blood that stains human hands? We must own the division, the hatred, the abuse that humanity wilfully creates. Having owned it, it is then our duty to do whatever we can to oppose it and help those worst affected. The call to mercy demands it of us.

As I look around this room, I see it filled with very good people. Morally sound people. What we used to call good Christian people, but it isn't fashionable anymore.

Fashionable or not, our shared morality holds at its core the call to mercy. Before Christianity mercy was not seen in the world as a virtue at all. To be merciful were a weakness if you were a pre-Christian Roman, Celt, Saxon or Viking. But we have moved a long way 2000 years! Now mercy is something that is to be held in the highest regard. That's what makes us a civilised and caring society. We know how to be merciful, compassionate and caring. It doesn't much matter whether we think we are still a Christian country or not, because the legacy of 2000 years has still left an indelible mark deep within us that means we know how to be merciful, compassionate and caring. It is as if God has reached into the centre of our hearts and implanted there a little piece of his merciful self. Pray God, that may be true for our children too.

That is why the slaughter of God's precious children is always appalling to us, wherever they may be in the world. Our mercy and compassion require us to uphold the dignity of every human being. In upholding it, the consequences of war must always appal us. Every person killed, every parent or spouse bereaved, every community shattered. It should terrify us to imagine that it might be our child in that front line next. It should make it feel as though our merciful hearts would break. It should feel as though we are standing with Mary and

John at the foot of executioner's cross watching the blood of Jesus drip with its slow, tortuous and terminal rhythm.

And perhaps that is exactly where the Christian religion speaks to us most profoundly. That Jesus, our God and King, not only experienced the extents of human aggression and torture, but also of bodily pain and death. Jesus reaches out his compassionate arms from the cross and embraces each of us and the whole world when we are confronted with the same.

And that is exactly what we need to hear. When we are filled with pain and despair the horrors we see, or when we are filled with apathy and desensitised because of the sheer volume of violence in our world, or when we feel powerless to do anything to make a difference, it is exactly what we need to hear.

And hearing it, we go again, allowing our merciful hearts to drive us on as we never stop trying to build heaven on earth. Because 'God so loved the World that he gave his only son' Jesus Christ to save us (John 3:16).

Amen.

R.T. Parker-McGee 2022