

## **Remembrance 2015**

This year was the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Britain and the 76<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. At its conclusion some six years on, the world was inspired by a new hope that such tyranny and oppression would no longer drive humanity into such sinfulness, fear and aggression. The great sacrifices made at home and on the battlefield is in itself something to remember with gratitude and pride. And yet, with each passing year, it feels more and more conflicted for us to leave things on that level.

At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War there was a huge amount of hope and belief that we would never again see such large scale aggression, selfish ambition, torture and murder. However in 2015, like so many years in recent memory, we are reminded how the bitterness, hatred and fear that dominated the 1930's and 40's has not yet been driven from human hearts. In the past few years we have seen extreme ideologies increase in their popularity at an alarming rate, persecuting all who dare challenge their agendas. How many more such examples will mother earth have to sit back and observe?

If we are truly honest with ourselves, we can no longer suggest that these are simply the result of a specific religion, political agenda, nation or a single time. In the last 70 years we have seen Atheistic Communist regimes persecute and murder religious minorities at an alarming rate. Today numbers killed by such regimes are higher than ever. Similarly, we see dictatorship after dictatorship rise only to then suppress, abuse

and kill huge swathes of those they are called to care for and lead. Democratically elected governments have been seen turning to corruption, torture and mass murder to retain their power and influence. And recently, we have seen the sad cost and chaos that is caused from uprising and mass rule when all such political structures are removed. In the 70 years since the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War there have been some 120 major conflicts – nearly 2 every year. What is evident, then, is that 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 acceptance, understanding, compassion, love and hope are all lacking.

But in spite of what has happened since the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War there is still some room for pride and gratitude, especially as we remember those who made such great sacrifices then and in more recent times. Between 1939- 1945 the nation stood up courageously to a most terrible ideology and overcame it.

But many years have elapsed since the defeat of the Nazis, and many more ideologies and conflicts have cost the lives of millions of soldiers and civilians alike. So as well as remembering the great sacrifices made in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World Wars, Remembrance Day in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must also remember sacrifices made in Suiz, Korea, The Falklands, Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone, The Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Libya, Syria and the list goes on...

For many, to name some of these conflicts stirs in us a complicated mix of feelings about the incalculable cost of modern wars. As Christians we have some guidelines about this. Where non-believers might look back at the horrors of warfare over the past century and despair, Christians do not have that option. The slaughter of individuals so precious in God's sight is appalling, but we must never despair. The image we look to is Christ, the divine come to dwell with us, reigning even from the executioner's cross. Hitler wanted to change the symbol of the cross; to take Christ off it and replace him with a muscular Aryan holding a sword in his hand. That would have been to stand true Christianity on its head.

The remarkable truth about Jesus is that, if God was in Christ, as we claim he was, then there is hope in every situation, even, in apparent defeat and death. And all of us will have to face earthly defeat in the end. It was in absorbing the hatred, cruelty and pain of the world and refusing to respond with violence that Jesus broke the cycle of sin. He invites his followers to take up the cross of suffering and forgiveness, to respond with love not hatred.

In our first reading, the prophet Isaiah gives us an insight of what living in such a way might reap on our world – 'The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.'

Knowledge of God, then, brings peace. Or at least it should if we use it right. The reign of God has broken into creation through the victory of Jesus over sin and death, but its final fulfilment lies in the future, at least from the time-bound perspective of this created world. Christians wear the helmet of hope that one day all creation will be renewed and wrongs put right. We may quake at the idea of God as judge, but what does it actually mean? The late Cardinal Basil Hume once said, ‘Judgement is whispering into the ear of a merciful and compassionate God the story of my life which I had never been able to tell.’

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Judgement is what we *hope* for; not what we fear.

This is not a private, individual hope, but the hope of the whole of creation, relying on God’s goodness and the promise of God’s renewing work.

It is only hope in God that offers us a bigger picture in which to locate the terrible waste of human life that we have managed to produce, generation after generation. If we live without hope, if there is no horizon beyond the battlefield gravestones, then we really can only despair.

Human efforts to bring about peace on earth are required of us, and it is right that we should remember with respect those who have made such a great sacrifice on our behalf. We mark our joint grief with the

lowering of the banners at the Last Post and silence. But we also acknowledge our belief that all those making such huge sacrifices will be raised to glory in another time and place. We mark this belief with the banners raised again at the end of our silence and the playing of the reveille. Because only Christ will finally bring an end to the pain we witness around us. In this in-between time, we must live as children of the light, even when we seem to be surrounded by darkness. And so we acknowledge the mess we sometimes make of things, and we recall with pride and gratitude, but also with deep grief, the cost of sinfulness. We bring all of this to the cross where the crucified Lord reigns in ultimate victory.

So let us ask God to renew in us the hope that in Jesus we will see an end to death forever, and that those who have laid down their lives will be raised in glory together with all of us who remember them.

Amen

*R.T. Parker-McGee*