

Readings for Remembrance Sunday

10th November 2024

First Reading: Job 19:21-27a

Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me!
Why do you, like God, pursue me,
never satisfied with my flesh?
“O that my words were written down!
O that they were inscribed in a book!
O that with an iron pen and with lead
they were engraved on a rock forever!
For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see on my side,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”
The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel: St John 6:37-40

Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”

A Reflection for Remembrance Sunday

From Ven John Green

It's a great privilege to be asked to write a reflection on Remembrance, not because it gives me a chance to air my views, or to attempt to convince you that a certain opinion is right. Rather it gives me chance to invite you to ponder, think and reflect in a world which seems increasingly impatient and opinionated.

November seems a natural time to reflect, with the end of both the calendar and Church's year in sight. The festival of All Saints invites us to think about our place among *The Saints* – those who have gone before us in the Christian Faith, while the commemoration of All Souls gives us a chance to commend to God those close to us who have died – family and friends who have gone through this life before us.

And then comes Remembrance. To me there seems no right way of thinking about it – no single, correct approach. Perhaps I'm just a muddled old man, or perhaps the commemoration of those '*who died in two world wars and armed conflicts since*' does, by necessity, mean different things to different people – and even having to try to hold conflicting ideas at the same time.

I think it has always been thus since its inception in the aftermath of the First World War, The Great War, The War-to-end-all-wars – which, sadly, turned out to be *The-War-to-shape-all-future-wars*. The First World War harnessed human ingenuity to unleash an unprecedented level of carnage with the introduction of things like the machine gun and aerial and chemical warfare. Around half of British adult males of fighting age were mobilised during the conflict (a little over 5 million) of whom nearly a million were killed and 2 million wounded. Of the remaining 2 million, few returned home unaltered by what they had witnessed - something compounded by the fact that the majority of those at home could not begin to conceive conditions on the battlefields.

In what was a time of great social and political upheaval, not least because of the effects of the war, there were competing desires and needs. On the one hand there were survivors who wanted to celebrate victory and a war well-fought, while others needed to mourn death on an unparalleled scale. On a national level, there was a need to make some sort of sense of what had happened, and to see it as part of a greater purpose. In particular, there was the necessity to establish a sense of national unity that would allow the nation to mourn its dead and move on to the future.

As a family using a funeral service to celebrate a life, as well acknowledge mortality, helps them cope with the pain of bereavement, so Remembrance gave a way to think of *The Fallen* not simply as anonymous victims of bloody conflict, but as sacrificing themselves for a greater good. I've certainly been critical of hymns such as *Oh Valiant Hearts* (refusing to sing it) on the grounds that it equates the deaths of soldiers on the battlefield with the death of Christ on Calvary. [I still think it's inappropriate – death on a battlefield and Christ's death might both arise out of human sinfulness, but one is the result of human folly and the other the outpouring of divine love.] But even as I write this, I know that it is a gross over-simplification. I find myself much more sympathetic than I once was to the needs of a nation, communities and individuals reeling with grief to find something positive and noble to say about such an awful loss of life – and there I'm not only speaking of those who were actually killed.

In the years after its introduction, the national mood surrounding Remembrance softened, moving away from a celebration of victory (and knightly virtue) to a desire for peace. Perhaps those who had experienced battle first-

hand, and those who had lived with its consequences, saw the value of peace as an absence of conflict – while maybe for others, the peace which had been so valiantly fought for on the battlefield, and so dearly bought, was something to be treasured. Despite many conflicts since, it is this mood of sombreness which has persisted – I think with good cause.

It can, of course, be tempting to distance ourselves from the whole thing saying, “It’s nothing to do with me. I didn’t go to war and I haven’t got anyone in the Forces!” Some will disagree, but I believe the way in which we live and the various choices we make contribute to a world in which injustice and inequality drive conflict. For better or for worse, being human (for most of us) involves living in society which comes as a package from which we can’t pick and choose the bits we like. We’re all in this together whether we like it or not and, like taxes and the law, there’s no escaping from responsibility!

Human life is messy and involves wrestling with conflicting thoughts and emotions. To put it at its most basic, being human involves living in that area where our emotions and rational thought vie for attention. We can think we are of a different order to the other creatures with which we share the earth – and, in our better moments, there can be glimpses of the divine in how we act towards others. However, there are also times when we show we’re no better than other species in ruthlessly exploiting size or strength in pursuit of what we want. To me, there are few things that show the messiness of being human better than standing silent for two minutes at a memorial to those killed in war, reflecting on the responsibility we all share for how we live.

There is so much to reflect on. An awareness of the futility of war; the realisation that those who declare wars rarely fight in them; that every action we take has consequences which can sometimes lead to disaster; the fact that those who fight in wars are generally swept along in a tide of events over which they have little control. Certainly, many who fought in the First World War as volunteers found themselves buoyed along by public opinion as much as a desire to do their duty. There are plenty of negative emotions associated with war – hatred, survival at all costs, desire for revenge and sheer cruelty. But there is also heroism and self-sacrifice. You might say all of human life is there!

Although modern warfare can involve killing on an industrial scale, and can be the epitome of inhumanity, shared hardship and danger engenders a camaraderie that can forge remarkably close and self-giving relationships. Add to that the fact that, for many people, being a member of a fighting force can give a sense of purpose that they’ve never experienced before, and you can see why some can look back on wartime as a good time for them!

So, when I stand at the War Memorial in Lochinver on Remembrance Sunday during two minutes silence, I will be pondering many things. How sad it is that we still need to fight wars and that, too often, might is still right! I’ll be remembering friends who died in conflict – not always heroically, but also through stupid accidents in the chaos of war; and I’ll also be remembering inspiring acts of bravery and self-sacrifice. I’ll be thinking of those whose deaths in the Great War caused so much anguish, and the need to speak in terms of the *Glorious Dead*; and with them I’ll be thinking of those currently serving in the Forces who, in an increasingly unstable world, often stand between us and those who might be tempted to use force against us. I’ll be remembering my own time in the Royal Navy, things I achieved and friends I made there. I’ll also be thinking about how the world is and the choices that I’ve made, and make every day, that contribute to it being the way it is. I’ll be thinking of all those who have willingly or unwillingly given their lives for the relative freedom we enjoy.

Above all, I think, I'll be grateful for those around me – some thinking very different thoughts from me – that as a community we can come together, acknowledging the messiness of human life and the common hope that one day enough young blood might be shed to make humanity find a lasting peace. Until then I'll let Sir John Arkwright have the last word from O Valiant Hearts!

“O risen Lord, O Shepherd of our dead,
Whose cross has bought them and Whose staff has led,
In glorious hope their proud and sorrowing land
Commits her children to Thy gracious hand.”