



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for the Remembrance Sunday (14th November) 2021

I recently had cause to reflect that at the time of my birth, the Second World War was not twenty years over. When, as a child, I stood at the War Memorial on this day, as often as not - or so it seemed - every other person was there to remember a parent or child, a husband or wife, a brother or sister, who had fallen prey to the conflict.

More than perhaps we realised, the war was a continuing context to our lives. Political memoirs and commentaries often observe that cabinet ministers of all political hues had lived through those six years of conflict and many of them had served in the armed forces. The analysis is that this affected the choices they made and the policies they pursued.

More broadly in society at large, memories of the war shaped attitudes. There was a personal recollection of how close we came to defeat; and a real appreciation of the sacrifice that was made by the people we honour today for having delivered us from the Nazi onslaught,

Over the decades, of course, the personal connexion with the war has diminished. A few still remember those times and a handful of its heroes are with us still - as proudly we know here; but when we remember family members today it is much more often distant ancestors, whom we hardly knew, if at all.

There have been conflicts and those who served in them deserve our honour and respect in the same way - as the people of *Royal Wootton Bassett* demonstrated. However, those wars did not consume the nation in the way that the Great War and the World War, which followed it did.

As the memory of the war has faded, so have the attitudes that it inculcated in us. In many ways, this must be a good thing: it surely cannot be right that the highest aspiration of society is to be defined by war; but as with all these things, some losses in the process of development are to be regretted.

Amongst them, perhaps, is the fear of where quarrels and their escalation will lead. This is the case for governments, of course, but it is equally true at more local levels where the attitudes that feed conflicts on the bigger stage are incubated. Sometimes, amidst the stridency and aggression it feels as if the appetite for living in peace is receding; but not for us here this morning.

Peace is a dominant theme of our Mass this morning. The Christian way of honouring those who have sacrificed their lives in war is to pray that through their earthly deaths, they may find the eternal peace of God's love as they journey beyond this world: the peace, which Jesus' incarnate Ministry proclaimed and secured for us by His Sacrifice.

At the same time, the fact that we gather for such an event is a poignant reminder of how far humanity strayed from God's Purpose - how degraded human society had become that it was necessary to engage in such carnage. Surely, we should reflect, they did not die just so that we could do it all over again.

The Peace of Christ, is not, in God's Will, intended just for the eternal realm beyond the life of this world; it is His command that we should search to establish it here in earth as it is in Heaven. As, this morning, we survey the cost of its alternative, we might reflect that we honour their sacrifice not just with silence and the dutiful prayer we offer for them, but also in working to ensure that another generation will not follow them into the miseries of armed conflict. In that way, as we pray, they and their memory may, indeed, rest in peace.