

Homily for Remembrance Sunday.

Psalm 46

1 God is our refuge and strength,

a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,

though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

3 though its waters roar and foam,

though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,

the holy habitation of the Most High.

5 God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;

God will help it when the morning dawns.

6 The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;

he utters his voice, the earth melts.

7 The Lord of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our refuge.

8 Come, behold the works of the Lord;

see what desolations he has brought on the earth.

9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;

he burns the shields with fire.

10 "Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations,

I am exalted in the earth.”

11 The Lord of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Luke 21: 5 – 19

5 Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 6 “As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.”

7 “Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?” 8 He replied: “Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them. 9 When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.” 10 Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

12 “But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. 13 And so you will bear testimony to me. 14 But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. 15 For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. 16 You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. 17 Everyone will hate you because of me. 18 But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 Stand firm, and you will win life.

Each year at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month people gather at War memorials to remember the dead of the Great War, and to remember all those who have suffered because of armed conflict since that ‘war to end all wars’.

People gather on Armistice Day, and on Remembrance Sunday, to remember lost comrades and loved ones, and also to express a sense of gratitude to all those who have served their country.

Remembering the victims of past conflicts should also strengthen our determination to work for peace in the future.

In this service we remember the victims of armed conflict in the context of a Christian act of worship. Jesus himself died at the hands of the soldiers acting on the orders of Pontius Pilate, the military governor of an occupying army. Pilate gave his crucifixion order largely because of the zealous entreaties of local religious leaders. At the centre of the Christian story hangs a man bloodied, tortured, and killed because of humanity's tragic propensity to fall in to hatred and violence.

The bonds that unite us, family, tribe, nation, religion, social class, ethnicity, sexuality, all these things are good in that they raise us above our own selfish viewpoint, but are dangerous if they cause us to think less of others.

The God of the bible is not a tribal totem, He is God of all; no one can recruit Him to their cause, and He bids all His children live in peace.

Warfare destroys the bonds between human beings, just as warfare breaks communion between humanity and God, the way of Jesus shows that the bonds broken by war and hatred can be restored, and humanity once more reconciled to God.

Human history demonstrates that we know all too well how to make war; Jesus teaches us how to make peace.

When faced with violence and destruction, after the initial shock and horror has subsided, there are two ways we can respond.

We can hang on to our anger and ferment it in to bitterness and a desire for revenge, allowing violence to breed violence in our souls, a violence that seeks to destroy others. Or we can cry out in pain, but still determine that the violence should claim no more victims, and instead work to bring about good.

An issue of the journal of Spirituality and Health had on its front cover a picture of three U.S. ex-servicemen standing in front of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C.

One asks, "Have you forgiven those who held you prisoner of war?"

"I will never forgive them," replies the other.

His mate says: "Then it seems they still have you in prison, don't they?"

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once wrote, "Forgiving is not forgetting; it's actually remembering-- remembering and not using your right to hit back... the remembering part is particularly important. Especially if you don't want to repeat what happened."

He was writing in the context of the end of Apartheid, and the search for a peaceful way to bring reconciliation to violently divided communities, he explained,

"Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what happened seriously and not minimizing it; drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence."

Personally, I believe at times it is necessary for the strong to take up arms in defence of the weak, but there can be no lasting peace without forgiveness and reconciliation.

Easy for me to say? Easy for me who has never been to war? Easy for me who has never suffered violence?

In his Easter address from St Sophia Cathedral President Zelensky of Ukraine spoke of the pain and anguish of his nation, saying, "Our hearts are full of fierce fury. Our souls are full of fierce hatred for the invaders and all that they have done." Yet he prayed, "Don't let fury destroy us from within.... Turn it into a force of good to defeat the forces of evil."

Making peace between nations, or indeed in our own personal lives, often requires at least as much courage and determination as making war.

Forgiveness is not the easy way out, it is the hard way out.

Not to forgive is no way out at all. It is to embrace the evil that has embraced you.

As we remember those who have fallen in the service of their country we too should determine to bring good out of evil, and to work for peace, we owe it to those who have died, we owe it to future generations, and we owe it to ourselves.

Jesus died at the hands of violent men, because of the anger and brutality of powerful men, but the resurrection of Jesus shows that life and love ultimately overpower violence and hatred. When the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples his first words to them were, 'peace be with you'.

As we heard in our Psalm,

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;

he burns the shields with fire.

Death and hatred do not have to win if we follow the way of Jesus, the way that leads to new life in this world and the next.

In the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace,

Amen