

Remembrance Day

FROM WAR TO PEACE

*They will not grow old, as we who are left grow old;
age will nor weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
we will remember them.*

We will remember them. Remembrance Day calls across the decades bringing to mind memories of conflict, stories of loved ones no longer seen, fading newsprint with despatches from the front, pictures of battle, destruction, grief and death – which now we see again on the news from Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Remembrance Day speaks to us of the best and the worst of human life: of sacrifice and heroism, daring and liberty; of horror and suffering, brutality and oppression. The national act of memory in which we participate today is a determination that the best shall overcome the worst. We honour death in battle so that the price of freedom is not forgotten, but we cheapen that price and dishonour those deaths if we do not also resolve that that we shall learn from history and so be liberated from repeating it.

Only such a lesson gives meaning to so many lives lost, civilian as well as military. This lesson is hard to learn as recent events in France and Vienna tragically remind us, and so today we pray not just for those who have died in war but also for peace – that we shall know the way of peace. The universal Prayer for Peace, said daily for twenty years and more by many thousands throughout the world, is one such prayer. It has four petitions:

Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth.

Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust.

Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace.

Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.

Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth.

How we see other people determines our attitude towards them. Wars usually involve a collective falsehood about the other side. The Nazis taught that the Jews were sub-human; many in this country believed that the only good German was a dead German; in the cold war the communist world was described as 'the evil empire', and in our own day muslims are demonised. But the truth is different. The piety of many Muslims puts many Christians to shame, and, as we saw in Iraq, brutality characterises both sides – as the pictures from Abu Ghraib made plain. To move from death to life we must move from falsehood to truth.

Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust.

Wars often arise from fear, and fear often arises from despair, the absence of a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives. We live in such times today. Some years ago the BBC broadcast a series called 'The Power of Nightmares'. It argued that the rise of global terrorism and the response to it were both motivated by fear – a fear created by the vacuum caused by the failure of the political vision of both left and right, and which militant Islam is equally unable to fill. The vacuum can only be filled by hope. The Christian hope is in a power and a destiny beyond anything that the world can provide; a hope in which all things are brought together in God, differences reconciled and diversity celebrated. In that hope we can move from fear to trust.

Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace.

We have seen too much of the face of hate – most recently in Paris, Nice and Vienna, but also in the atrocities inflicted on the people of Darfur, in the ethnic cleansing of Bosnia, the genocide of Rwanda, and the continuing spiral of violence in Israel/Palestine. Those who commit atrocities can only do so if they dehumanise their victims. Violence against the sub-human is somehow acceptable, and that provides an excuse for war. Love believes that everyone is a child of God and is equally precious in his sight, even the brutal and the tyrannical. Love builds bridges through self-sacrifice, not barriers of self-preservation; love seeks the truth; love offers trust. To move from war to peace we must move from hate to love.

Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.

The way of peace requires of us a change of heart. The desire to be reconciled comes from our spirit and emotions rather than from our intellect. It requires a willingness to walk in another's shoes, to see the world through their eyes. It is not satisfied with a *modus vivendi* that allows those at enmity to live with their differences, but desires to transcend them and find a new future together. The way of peace and reconciliation is more a disposition of the heart than a skill to be acquired; it is more spirituality than strategy. And so today as we remember them, let us also pray:

Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth.

Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust.

Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace.

Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.