

SERMON 12 NOVEMBER 2017

O Lord, let me try to be right;
Or at the very least, let me try to be true.
In the name of Christ. Amen

We will remember them.

Today is Remembrance Sunday and we are here on this solemn occasion to remember the sacrifices of the Armed Forces in World War I and World War II, as well as all the countless skirmishes, battles, incidents, combats, and all manner of hostilities since then, not forgetting the innumerable civilian victims which is alas a characteristic of modern warfare.

There exists a certain school of thought which attempts to denigrate the idea of war, and soldiers, and conflict, attempting to argue that if only man could learn to live in peace and harmony with his fellow man, we would have no need of armies, and weapons and fighting.

In order to bolster their argument they quote Matthew 5:9 : Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

And yet, consider this: what is a soldier but a peacemaker? When I refer to soldier, I am using the word in a generic sense and mean members of all armed forces. A soldier wages war in order to bring about a state of peace. During wartime he fights in order to secure the cessation of hostilities, so in that sense he is a peacemaker.

But we know that soldiers are used in peacetime for many activities that serve people and communities in grave and catastrophic situations, like earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes. They are also utilised in peacekeeping missions in war zones to try and protect civilian populations and to allow belligerent parties a neutral space in which to discuss peace negotiations.

Members of the Armed Forces are also used in situations of civilian breakdown, to bolster police actions, out of control fires, air traffic control, and many other situations in which they do not fight but use their training and professional skills in service of others. So in a very real sense a soldier is a peacemaker.

However, a soldier cannot be blamed for war or fighting. A soldier exists to carry out orders given to him by the political rulers of the state which he serves. If anyone is responsible for a state of belligerence, it is not the soldier who is to blame but the politicians who have not been able to discuss rationally and peaceably a situation of conflict.

Now we know that there are many crackpots and egomaniacs in the history of the world who are not prepared to be rational and to discuss matters peaceably, but who want things, goods, riches, wealth, lands, and the only way to acquire them is to take them by force. Contrary to the popular adage, it does not take two to tango.

There is a famous saying attributed to Edmund Burke: The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. If you are attacked, you must defend yourself. Thus there exists always the need to have an army ready and prepared to defend the territory it protects. There will always be a need for a military force since mankind is a belligerent species. If you look at nature he merely reflects what already exists in many other species.

Do not blame the soldier for waging war, on the contrary we must thank him for the many tasks he accomplishes in society, both in wartime and in peacetime.

We will remember them.

In particular today we remember those many members of all Armed Forces who gave up their lives in combat so that we might live in a free world, and not as subjects of irrational and evil regimes.

Si vis pacem, para bellum.

This is a Latin adage translated as, "If you want peace, prepare for war". It is adapted from a statement found in Book 3 of the Latin general Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus's tract *De Re Militari*, although the idea which it conveys also appears in earlier works such as Plato's *Nomoi* or *Laws*.

Every state must be ready and prepared to defend itself against attacks from other states or nations. It should not be the aggressor but should always stand ready to defend. If you want peace, prepare for war.

This is also, serendipitously or deliberately, the message of today's Gospel reading.

The ten bridesmaids have all been invited to meet the groom. All of them took their lamps, but only the five wise ones also took oil. The five foolish ones took no oil, and when the bridegroom arrived they were unprepared and the door to the wedding banquet was shut against them.

Even worse, not only were they not accepted to the banquet, they were categorically rejected, since after their plea 'Lord, Lord, open to us', 'he replied, "Truly, I tell you, I do not know you'.

If you are not ready for the Lord, he does not know you. We know neither the day nor the hour so we must keep awake.

For me this refers not only to the Second Coming of Christ which has been promised to us, but to every situation in which we find ourselves. I believe this is a clear call to all believers to live our lives in a manner that reflects our commitment and our service to God and to our fellow man. I further believe that this applies not just to Christians, but actually to all people, even those who do not believe, because we are all living in one world on one planet and it is our collective and individual responsibility to care for it and for all living creatures that inhabit this beautiful world of ours.

Many many soldiers who died fighting were not believers, yet they gave their lives in service, fighting for their country. We know that God appreciates this and will remember them, from John's Gospel (15:13 KJV): Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

We may not be called to offer such a sacrifice, but we are called to honour their memory which we do on this day every year. We have a duty of remembrance and we must not forget to tell our children and the coming generations. It is our duty to pass on to future generations our faith in God, but also the valor, and pain, and suffering of the armed forces in warfare.

We are all members of the human race and for we Christians it is our duty to live our lives in such a way that will give glory to God and love to our neighbours. For non-Christians I believe it is their duty to live their lives in such a way that it will not dishonour them and will show love to their neighbours.

We must be prepared at all times to receive our God, or to be received

by Him. Our deeds and actions must reflect our words, and we must live to honour God, and to keep those two great commandments: to love our God and to love our neighbour.

We put our faith in our Lord and he will not reject us, if we are ready for him, by how we live our lives in service to Him and to others. On the contrary, we will go in with Him to the wedding banquet and will not be left out in the cold behind a closed door.

We heard today from the reading of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. The sacrifice of the Armed Forces is not in vain, for when the Lord himself will descend from Heaven, the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever.

But only if you're ready and prepared. Keep awake therefore. Remember with pride today the sacrifice given by so many in war for us, and work together to be peacemakers.

In Jesus' name

Amen