

Trinity XXII St Columba St Bride 12 November 2017

My text from the book Wisdom: 'THE souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,'

On this commemoration of Remembrance, there are good reasons to reflect on what has been said on this occasion over the years: because the fundamental message which we value on this day does not change: the locations of the fight change, the people who have been involved change, but the situation of man in mortal struggle with man does not change: the reactions which we all feel, even when we are at a great distance from the fight, do not change. So it is that we need to repeat the message that we need must find better ways to handle conflict between peoples. It is with great relief that I heard the other day that Mr. Trump and the Korean President, Mr. Moon, are in agreement that their task must be to encourage their mutual foe, Mr. Kim to come to the table and discuss what it is that is causing the exchange of bellicose rhetoric between them. Or to know that Congo, the DRC, where many millions of people have died in internecine conflict will be holding elections which will placate the foes.

When most of us were growing up, it was with a knowledge of what war had meant in the very recent past: even for those who had not endured gunfire, bombing, deceit and betrayal in Europe; bombing, shortages, rationing and rocket attacks in Britain; for so many had close ties to family and friends in Europe, as well as those who had fathers, mothers, sons and daughters who were directly involved in the armed forces arraigned against the forces of darkness which threatened freedom and the rule of law in so many countries.

But war as such was a distant thing: there were, for sure, some photographs in the newspapers, but for most people, the only understanding of what had happened was often to be found in the letters, which, even when marked with the censor's pen, still told the story of the horror: but at a distance, so to speak, a distance of time and space: so that most of us could appreciate the courage and bravado of the few in the RAF, the bravery of the mini-submariner, of the stoker on the munitions ship but without any of the truly awful destruction: 'For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood' (Isaiah 9.5) - that goes along with that very courage.

Today, as we see video footage of the assault on Raqqa in northern Iraq, or the destruction of Eastern Aleppo in Syria, we are suddenly exposed as never before to the true horror of war, and the abject fear which this violence imposes on children, and the terrified mothers and fathers who strive to protect them from all that is happening around them. It is perhaps with this clear evidence of man's inhumanity to man that we need to cling to these words from the Wisdom of Solomon - who, you will recall, built the temple in Jerusalem as a man of peace: David said to Bathsheba: 'Even as I swear unto thee by the LORD God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day.' (1 Kings 1.30), for it was known to David that, as he was a man of war, God would not countenance his building of the temple.

In all of this, and despite comments implying that our world is in the hands of man and science, it is essential that we understand the faith as taught to us by Jesus Christ and that the cornerstone of the

faith is that this world in which we live is God's Creation, not something assembled by humankind. Once we accept this fact, it is easy to understand why 'THE souls of the righteous are in the hand of God' because we have been taught and come to understand that God loves all His creation; that God loves each and every one of us, even when we cannot comprehend how He can do this. And that He goes even further, in that He is prepared to allow men and women to deny Him, to ridicule Him, to despise Him, but even with all that, He loves them and sends His Son, Jesus Christ, Who died so that our sins can be forgiven!

'And there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction;' For those who have disowned God, those whose soul is withered, who have refused to allow the Holy Spirit to help them, they are the unwise: they are those who believe that when life ends, it is final: whereas the faithful understand through the grace of the Holy Spirit guiding us, that this earthly life is but part of life, and that life eternal beckons, where we too will 'shine, and run to and froe like sparks among the stubble;'

For all those who gave their lives for us, we can pray that as they approached their final moments, even for those who had not known Christ, that they too like the thief on the cross of perdition, might call out and beg forgiveness of Him Who earned that very possibility that we can be forgiven, even Jesus Christ our Lord, Who is absolutely aware of every harm done to every person in every place, for which we shall have to answer, but for which we have been given the Grace of forgiveness and absolution, as those also receive in the last moments before they pierced the veil between this life and the next, where they find truth in these words from Wisdom: 'but they are in peace'.

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