

Remembrance Sunday

First may I say how disappointed I am that we cannot be together in church marking this particular occasion. Like many of you, I find remembrance not only moving but a necessary reminder of what can happen when we lose our focus on what is important and allow ourselves to be selfishly diverted.

Remembrance has never been about glorifying war but about reminding ourselves of the human cost of what happens when humanity forgets to be humane.

Sadly, time and again, we forget the hard won lessons of the past for the sake of a comfortable present. You see it doesn't take two to make a war, it takes one; one country or group or creed that is willing to seek its own ends at the cost of others, and the willingness of others to turn their backs until they themselves are directly impacted. When evil is allowed to go unchallenged and unchecked it grows to the point where only violence will stop it.

There is an Old Testament idea of challenging your neighbours if they behave in a way that is detrimental to the community, this is often echoed in the writings of St Paul as he calls the first congregations to act morally. Of course Jesus taught us not to judge and to look to our own behaviour before we criticise others. How then do we pull these two together and what on earth does it have to do with remembrance?

This is where I need to be careful because it is a topic where the Church has made massive mistakes in the past. Too often the morality police have pointed fingers at individuals, tut-tutted, thrown their hands up in horror and then DONE NOTHING TO HELP. I am certain that one of the reasons Jesus was so often ticked off with the religious know it all's was for just that failure to act. They would criticise and condemn but fail to remove the social problems that led to the brokenness in the first place. For instance it is easy to look down your nose at a prostitute or addict but not so easy to do something about the social conditions that lead to people being used in such ways.

What we should do is challenge the injustices in the first place.

As Christians we are called to stand against evil and to challenge the institutions that allow such situations to arise. Of course certain groups would be horrified at using the word 'evil' to describe anything. Apparently we live in a world where such phrases as 'comparative morality' and 'alternative life-styles' are a thing! You know a bloke wanting to wear a skirt is an alternative life-style and I say good luck to him, or when a lass wants to become a boxer, no problem; but whenever one group wants to belittle, abuse and/or eliminate another group that is evil and that is where we need to draw the line.

Just like the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' time we make far too big a deal of the life-style choices and not enough of the real evils out there. Perhaps because it is easy to point fingers and rather more difficult to actually act – heaven forbid we might actually have to sacrifice something. Which brings me almost back to where I started.

After the 1st world war the League of Nations was set up to challenge such evils on an international level because they recognised that, and I quote, "Aggressive war is a crime not only against the immediate victim but against the whole human community. Accordingly it is the right and duty of all states to join in preventing it; if it is certain that they will so act, no aggression is likely to take place." Unfortunately although they saw the need they constantly hesitated in acting. They saw the atrocities of the Japanese in China – but did nothing, they saw the inhumanity against the Ethiopians by the Italians – but did nothing; they failed to act in the Spanish Civil War and we all know what they didn't do when the Nazis' were annexing land and brutalizing Communists, Gays, Gypsies and the Jewish people.

I suppose there were many reasons why they didn't act – monetary cost, political weakness, fear of war itself – but ultimately, because they didn't act, the world ended up fighting another world war only a generation after they thought they had fought the war to end all wars.

Because no one had the courage to challenge evil, evil thought it could do what it liked.

This concerns me greatly because I see the same unwillingness to challenge evil growing as I see the same growth of the willingness to turn a blind eye. I see a growth in our willingness to accept abuse of others and a lack of desire to do anything about it. We are forgetting what we really should be remembering.

Whenever we hear another person or group belittling another and do nothing to challenge it we are taking a step closer to another Auschwitz. We hear of children being bombarded while in school or hospital and choose to worry more about whether or not we can go abroad for our holidays we are choosing our comfort over another's life. Evil is awake and trampling unchecked over battlefields my father's generation thought they had won.

So this Remembrance Sunday we need to remember. Not just those who have fallen but the reasons they had to fight in the first place. We need to remember what happens when human beings allow evil free reign and we need to remember our obligation to stand up and challenge the darkness before it becomes any stronger. Remember God does not want empty piety he wants us to act.

Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.