

## *Remembrance Sunday - The War to End All Wars*

This year sees the centenary of the Armistice which marked the end of the First World War in Europe. That was described optimistically in Britain as 'The War to End All Wars' - but of course it didn't. Indeed the terms imposed by the victors at Versailles in 1919 were felt in Germany as a humiliation; and that resentment became a seed-bed where the poison of Nazism grew.

So one lesson which we might draw after the passage of a hundred years is this: if you want peace never humiliate your enemies. If you want peace, try to hold on to a trust in their **fundamental humanity** regardless - even if you cannot see it now and have come to view them as the most inhuman and 'unforgiveable' of aggressors. The peacemaker has to be willing to do the 'Soul Work' that leads beyond bitterness and revenge.

Otherwise, the only way to 'get even' is to lower yourself to your oppressor's level. **Resentment** can only ever lead you back to the unresolved conflict - because that is precisely the meaning of the word: '*re-sentire*' - **to feel again**.

That much is common sense, if we wish to move beyond retribution to reconciliation and eventually, perhaps, to the prospect of new friendship and respect. But Christians are surely called to something more than this pragmatic approach to conflict resolution.

You might have thought that in a 'Christian' continent just that one simple saying of Christ: *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you* (Mt 5:24) would have barred the road to the horrors of trench warfare. In fact it is the whole ministry of Jesus which challenges Pilate's cynical violence:

Our Messiah seeks out a donkey, not a warhorse, on Palm Sunday. He tells Peter to put away his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane (Jn 18:11). He prays for his executioners (Lk 23:24). And his whole career, before that fateful Holy Week, had been spent in reaching out to those seen as 'the enemy within' - public sinners, lepers, the possessed...

That is the path to peace: the risky dialogue with people who seem not at all like us, who seem, perhaps, to pose a threat (and whose views, maybe, we find unacceptable). That is the path to peace: the rejection of easy sloganising and of the ridiculing of the enemies we're taught to hate. For this much is always true: **these are our sisters and brothers**. Like ourselves, God's image and likeness is 'in their DNA'. And there we have the measure of the tragedy of war: it is **always fratricide**, though we pretend it otherwise, in order to plan and then sustain our rage. As Martin Luther King said: *We must learn to live together as fellows or perish together as fools*.

It's easy to dismiss this take on Christian ethics as too other-worldly and naive to be worth more than a pitying glance. And yet it is a highly realistic take on the types of war being fought or threatened today.

We all of us live with the possibility of nuclear destruction, and the rhetoric of certain national leaders earlier this year seemed to take us closer to the abyss than anything since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

But it is not only our own nuclear 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' which are ethically unusable in modern conflict. The destructive power of contemporary so-called 'conventional' weaponry makes untenable claims that violence is acceptable if it is proportional to the good achieved by military victory.

Promises of 'non-combatant immunity' (another key concept of the Just War theory) has also become virtually meaningless.

Meanwhile, the diversion of resources to the manufacture and the purchase of weaponry already kills before a shot is fired - with the sick left unattended and the poor uneducated. And the flood of small-arms destabilises whole societies.

As Christians we face a 'call to arms' of a different nature: our fight must be a fight to 'end all wars'. Warfare is the 'road to nowhere' and 'unworthy of our humanity' as Pope St John Paul II repeatedly insisted. So let this Remembrance Sunday be a moment not only of prayer but of recommitment to the path of the One who said: *'Blessed are the Peacemakers, they shall be called the children of God'*.

We cannot act effectively alone. We need to join with others to take actions that foster peace, locally and globally. Pax Christi, the international Catholic Peace movement, provides ideas, resources, and inspiration to empower each and all of us to move beyond past tragedies to a future of peace and justice for our children.

The increasing custom of wearing or displaying white poppies as well as the traditional red ones is a sign of such determination. Along with the sorrowful respect for those who sacrificed their lives for our welfare betokened by the red flower, we indicate - by the white poppy - a desire to be engaged in promoting the attitude, and in works, that make for peace between peoples.

A story worth repeating on this occasion is that of the old Rabbi who asked the students sitting before him: *How can you tell that the night is over and the day has come?*

One replied: *Is it when we can distinguish clearly between the sky and the land and the sea?* The Rabbi responded: *That is true, but it is not the answer I am looking for.*

Another student, looking at the fields around, asked: *Is it when we can tell the sheep from the goats?* Again the Rabbi responded: *That is also true, but it is not the answer I am looking for.*

Several other students offered suggestions but, as all were rejected, the group said to the Rabbi: *Tell us then, Master, how can we best tell the day from the night?*

And the Rabbi responded:

***When you can look at any person and see in them your brother or sister then the night will be over and day will have dawned; the darkness will be gone, and the light will have come.***