



Homily for Remembrance Sunday Mass

Cardiff Cathedral

Sunday 8th November 2020

Archbishop George Stack

Many of us, I imagine, have used some days of this enforced lockdown to tidy up, throw things out, replacing the spring clean of earlier this year with an Autumn clean at the end of the year and hoping the exercise won't have to be repeated next year! One of the items which continually delays the clear out is, of course, the old photograph album. Events long forgotten. People no longer with us. Memories fading further and further into the past.

One of the dangers of living in an age of instant response and gratification is an attitude which says that we have nothing to learn from the past. It is good to remember the saying: *"Those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are bound to repeat them"*. Sometimes, it seems as though we live in an age of collective amnesia. Consumer culture eradicates the customs and landscapes we have inherited. It promotes immediate gratification and fails to acknowledge that we are standing on the shoulders, the wisdom, the sacrifices of those who have gone before us.

One of the most important words in the Christian faith is 'remember'. It takes us to the heart of the sacrifice of love which Jesus offered in his death on the cross. And to ensure that this was not just to be a memory fading further and further into the distant past, he took the "stuff" of life, food and drink, bread and wine and breathed his life into them -

and into us also. *“Do this in remembrance of me”*. So for Christians, every Sunday is Remembrance Sunday. For two thousand years, the followers of Jesus have re-membered, put back together again the broken members of his body. In our confession at the beginning of Mass we ask, *“is our tomorrow worthy of Christ’s yesterday?”*? And in our Holy Communion with Him and with each other we try to say *“Yes. The way I try to live my life today and tomorrow is worthy of the yesterday of Christ and his sacrifice of love”*.” As we sing in the well-known hymn:

“One bread one body, one Lord of all.

One cup of blessing which we bless.

And we, though many, throughout the world,

Are one body in this one Lord.”

Just as Jesus paid the ultimate price of love in his death, so too we believe that those who gave their lives in war, in the service of peace, are somehow drawn into the sacrifice he offered for the salvation of the world. God alone knows how. They may not have understood the reasons for war. They may not even have agreed with those reasons. But out of obedience and duty they served and paid the ultimate price. *“For your tomorrow we gave our today”*.

The families of those who survived wars often say that the veterans never spoke about their experiences. They had seen too much suffering. Silence was their only language. That is surely one reason why we keep two minutes silence on this day of Remembrance. Silence is the true language of remembrance because no words can express the depth of emotion and the deep questions which lie at the heart of the memories we evoke today.

But we all know there are different kinds of silence. One is simply the absence of noise – difficult in our day and age. A more serious silence is when no one wishes to communicate. This is a cold, hostile silence, an outward expression of irreconcilable differences. And this silence is often a prelude to violence. The guns and bombs begin only when the talking has stopped.

Another kind of silence is calm and mutual. It recognises that what matters is much more than we can put into words. That is the silence of Remembrance Sunday. We need to be silent together and recognise that sometimes the most important thing we can do is say nothing when confronted with suffering, sin and death. No accident that this silence takes us into the heart of prayer. *“Heart speaking to heart in the silence of the heart”* as St. John Henry Newman said. When Mother Teresa was asked what she did when she prayed, she

said *“I listen to God”*. And what does God say was the next question. *“God listens to me”* she replied. Let us listen to God in the silence of our hearts. And remember.
