

RECALLING THE PAIN OF WAR

Remembrance Sunday is not reserved for remembering only the dead combatants of one side in World War I. On this day, we remember all whose lives have been ended or blighted in any way by war, any war. Our memory today includes the big wars that have ravaged our world – two great world wars of 1914-18 and 1939-45, more localised wars in Korea, Vietnam, the Congo or the contemporary Middle East that still send out echoes worldwide, as well as times of civil unrest and the social upheaval that war brings in its wake.

The First World War claimed an estimated 37 million casualties. Eighteen million people lost their lives. Along with eleven million soldiers, mostly young men, from the opposing armies, seven million civilians died. Almost another twenty million were seriously wounded. A generation later, over 60 million people were killed in the Second World War. To put it more starkly: that was an estimated 3% of the total population of the world as estimated at the war's beginning, making it the most costly catastrophe in human history. More than fifty million civilians either died directly as a result of bombing or shooting or the death camps, or as a result of famine and disease brought on by war.

Modern warfare is more costly in human terms than war ever was before. The nature of modern weapons and the use of planes or guided missiles to strike at targets from a distance, means that the loss of civilian lives, even of children and the elderly, is the collateral and unavoidable cost of modern warfare.

Our first duty on Remembrance Sunday is to recall the pain of war, and anguish of those who suffered and continue to suffer from today's wars. Even if we wish to remember the loss of young combatants, we should never forget the human price they and their comrades who survived had to pay.

COMMITTED TO PEACE

Catholic moral theology traditionally acknowledged that on occasions, war might be just. Among the conditions that justified it were that it be undertaken as a last resort and that all other means had been tried. The force used should be proportionate to the wrong to be righted and that has a reasonable chance of success. Civilian casualties were to be avoided as much as possible. When wars were fought with swords and bows and arrows, there was some chance these conditions could be met. Given how modern warfare impacts on the civilian population, a just war seems more and more unlikely.

Twenty years after the end of World War II, Pope Paul VI was the first pope to address the United Nations. To the representatives of the world's nations, he said "No more war. War never again. It is peace, peace which must guide the destinies of peoples and of all humankind."

As followers of Jesus, who declared peace makers children of God, we are called to promote peace in our time. That might entail thinking about the kind of political choices we make – whether, for example, to support a particular party or not or to be ready to pay extra taxes for the sake of world development. ■



Today's readings

Wisdom 6:12-16
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25: 1-13

GOD'S WORD TODAY

As we approach the end of the Church's liturgical year, our reading of Matthew's Gospel at our Sunday Eucharist is also coming to its conclusion. The teaching of Jesus now looks forward to the coming of the Son of Man, represented in the parable by the bridegroom.

This will involve our giving an account of ourselves, so even if we do not think that the Lord will finally come in glory in our lifetime, it will affect us individually sometime. We are warned that we know neither the day nor the hour, so we are advised to Be Ready! Stay Awake!



SoulSpace

SERIES: REMEMBERING OUR DEAD

Season colour: **GREEN**

In this new, short series, Fr Brendan McConvery remembers the dead during the month of November.



A SUNDAY TO REMEMBER

At 11 am on Monday, 11 November 1918, the guns fell silent after more than four years of bombardment. The time and date had been chosen carefully so that there could be no confusion – the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. Ninety-nine years later, we still remember the day the fighting stopped, but we now usually recall it on the Sunday nearest the original date.