

Remembrance

This year's Remembrance Day on Sunday is particularly poignant as it marks one hundred years since the end of the First World War. That was supposed to be the war to end all wars, but as we know all too well that was not to be the case. The number of deaths, injuries and trauma was on a scale not encountered before. As a cruel twist of fate the war enabled the spread of the virulent Spanish flu, a pandemic that claimed even more lives throughout the world than the war itself.

Some of us saw Peter Jackson's film "They Shall Not Grow Old", which is being televised this Sunday evening. We are so used to seeing grainy images of the First World War which perhaps create a sense of remoteness. In contrast to see film that has been restored to sharpness and colour brings home the terrible conditions on the front and what seemed literally like hell on earth endured by the mainly young men who went out to fight for their country.

In our church dedicated to peace and reconciliation we cannot help but be conscious of the terrible cost of war – not just of the First World War but of the many more recent conflicts. The need to heal the wounds of history is as great as it ever has been.

Is war worth it, I am sure we ask ourselves. Can the loss of life and all the suffering be justified? Many conflicts do indeed seem senseless. Many are the result of the ambitions of an elite that could be resolved in other ways.

And yet there are conflicts in which a military response to aggression by one side may be the only viable solution – when diplomacy fails. Whether that was the case with the First World War is a matter of debate. It was arguably more clearcut in the case of Second World War.

In any case war is a result of failure: failure to talk, failure to respect others, failure to work for the good of all. To work for peace and justice is often extremely difficult, if not well nigh impossible. But that work must still continue if the type of suffering endured between 1914 and 1918, and at other times, is to be avoided.

This is where the Gospel message of love is still so relevant in our world today. God is love and God's plan for humanity is that we should love one another. God's love is so great that in the person of his Son Jesus Christ God shared in our human suffering, to the point of death. Jesus endured the ultimate sacrifice to which he refers in our reading just now (John 15.12-17). For that, and for the sacrifice of those who give their lives for the cause of peace and justice, we give thanks.

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