

SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE : ST MACARTIN'S CATHEDRAL, ENNISKILLEN

SUNDAY 22 NOVEMBER, 1987:

SERMON BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH, THE MOST REVEREND DR. ROBIN EAMES,
PRIMATE OF ALL IRELAND.

N.B. STRICT EMBARGO : SUNDAY 22 NOVEMBER : 12 NOON.

'Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be
called the childrn of God.'

Matthew 5. v.9.

A few months ago I stood in Changi Jail in Singapore. This prison so notorious during the second World War for the suffering and death endured by so many Allied prisoners of war is to-day surrounded by a modern international airport, high-rise flats and bustling supermarkets. The original outline of the jail remains and so do the memories of many who visit it to-day. My companion on the visit had his own memories of those other days :

"It looks different" he said. "There have been changes".
Then he paused. "But has anything really changed?".

At that moment a little child ran past to retrieve a coloured ball which had re-bounded from the wall of the prison.

My companion looked at her. He listened to the calls of her young friends.

"It's another world - isn't it?" he said.

// We have come to-day to the Cathedral to remember with dignity and humility those who made the supreme sacrifice in defence of freedom and democracy in two World Wars.. It is a day of memories of conflicts generations ago. It is a day made poignant by memories of more recent times : and those more recent memories gave such significance to the words we have just sung :

'Oh hear us ~~from~~^{for} our native land
The land we love the most'

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Flanders, the Somme, the beaches of Normandy, the deserts of North Africa, the islands of the Pacific, and the skies over Britain - for generations of Fermanagh families those phrases will always hold sacred memories. Like so many more families throughout Northern Ireland, Enniskillen and County Fermanagh remember two World Wars and the sacrifice made on foreign fields. United with so many families throughout Northern Ireland, Enniskillen and County Fermanagh remember those who have lost their lives over the past 18 years in the defence of the community against terrorism : members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Their sacrifice is vivid in our memories but it is no less a sacrifice made the more poignant because it occurred on their native soil. Now, to-day, as we meet to remember, other memories, other scenes and other faces are etched indelibly on our minds : those who lost their lives a few short weeks ago as they waited to remember the sacrifice of two World Wars. Because of that tragedy there can have been few Remembrance Services more significant, more an occasion for reflection and full of personal feeling than this. There can have been few Remembrance Services when people have been as conscious of the need to re-dedicate themselves to the cause of peace.

To-day I find myself giving an interpretation to the words of my companion in Singapore which is completely coloured by the events of the past few weeks :

"There have been changes but has anything really changed?"

There are those who look at the world in which we live and see generations growing up whose knowledge of world wars is confined to the pages of history books or T.V. drama and ask : 'Is it right to remember?'. There are those who look at international agreements and moves towards world disarmament and ask : 'Should we close the book on memories of war?'. There are those who see the young people of the world crossing frontiers once stained with blood and ask : 'Should we not forget the past and concentrate on the future?'.

Perhaps the tragic events surrounding this Service provides some answers to those questions. We do not want this generation to be obsessed with the

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emotions of a world at war but we face stark and devastating evidence that the ingredients for conflict, the seeds of human destruction and the capacity for man's inhumanity to man have not changed. The bullet and the bomb in Northern Ireland have produced sadness and loss of life which must be a constant reminder to society that human nature still contains those ingredients for destruction some would want us to forget. Recent events in this town remind us that when we become so immuned to violence that we fail to react we shall have lost the battle for civilised values. It is only when the voices of those calling for the rejection of violence, calling for greater human understanding and reconciliation, for a better world, become louder than those advocating the bullet and the bomb, only then will the world really come to understand the evil nature of terrorism.

The world has not always associated N.I. with Christianity. But behind the swiftness of our troubles so much of worst + value has to go on so
 The world has seen how strong those voices of compassion and humanity have *must deeply*
 been in the past few weeks. Few will ever forget the words of those who *of their*
 suffered so much here a fortnight ago. Out of the darkness of tragedy the *of compassion*
 world heard the voices of courage. Out of the potential for bitterness came lives,
 so much that spoke of Christian love. Out of the rubble came a sign of
 hope. No praise is great enough for the response of this community to the
 events of Remembrance Sunday. From the rescue efforts of service per-
 sonnel and civilians, from the work of the police, *magnificent rescue efforts of*
 the men and women of
 4 U.D.R., the ambulance and fire-service, the Erne Hospital, to the words
spoken in the aftermath - we had vivid and lasting evidence of that other
 side of human nature. The hands that struggled to move rubble, the hands
 that brought healing to wounds, the words of astounding compassion from those
 who could have been forgiven for words of anger, the wave of human sympathy
 that has swept across these islands - such have spoken so much louder than
 the bomb or bullet. Out of those events so many have sought unity in the
 community rather than division. So many have sought a way forward rather
 than a falling back. So many have prayed for a better future.

Out of the destruction of a world at war history has recorded so many examples of good out of evil.

Bishop Wilson of Birmingham survived Changi Jail to conduct the Confirmation of one of his torturers.

Coventry Cathedral rose from the ashes to be the centre for a movement of international reconciliation.

A British airman saw the clouds of the Atomic bomb and devoted his life to build homes for the disabled.

An American serviceman returned home to begin a world movement for the relief of disabled children in the Far East.

The words of Christ 'Blessed are the peacemakers' are as much a challenge to our society here and now as they were to a world recovering from global conflict. The contrast then between peace-lovers and those who want to work for peace is just as real to-day. The yearning of the Old Testament writer that swords should be turned into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks flows out from so many lips this morning. No one can plead ignorance to-day of what happens to ordinary people when violence or war is allowed to happen. Equally so, no one can doubt the cost of allowing violence and terror to inflict a community.

Out of our remembrance, out of our memories must shine brighter than ever the Christian hope and certainty that good comes out of evil, that decency overcomes hatred and that life and love are far stronger than death and division. How well I remember the words of a victim of the Enniskillen bombing as he lay on a trolley :

'God is here also'

It is before that same God that we reflect on our memories in this Service. It is before that same God that we as a Christian community want to look forward while never forgetting the lessons of the past. It is before that same God that all of us in positions to lead or influence others must answer questions that must not be allowed to go away.

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There were lessons that people said the world had learned in 1918. But in 1939 it all happened again. There were lessons people said the world had learned in 1945 and yet international tensions and localised conflicts remain. There have been moments in Northern Ireland when we have talked about 'turning points' yet the problems have continued. Over the past few weeks we have asked 'Is Enniskillen the turning point?' Has it really changed the course of events and the way people think?. Time alone will tell. Churchmen, governments, politicians, community leaders, ordinary people, young and old cannot live on as though Enniskillen did not happen. Enniskillen must be an important part in the process of peace. Let none of us forget that under God it is the task of the peacemaker to pick up the lessons of the past and go on. It is the task of the Christian to be in the forefront of the search for peace.

The history of mankind is filled with examples of failure to learn lessons. Weakness or lack of courage have so frequently checked real efforts to build a better world. Those who died that others might have a better tomorrow could well ponder on the world to-day. The sacrifice of so many lives over the years asks a question of our own community which goes to the root of our act of remembrance. Are we capable, have we the courage, do we possess the faith, to turn remembrance of recent days into a society of peace makers rather than peace lovers? If we are to be the real peacemakers we must go out from this service knowing that the Christian must be at the forefront of that process.

Are we equal under God to the hour?

We remember them. We must remember them all. But we must turn those memories into a resolve that their sacrifice took us forward, not back. Calvary gave the Christian world a special dimension to suffering. But we are the Easter people - we must be the people who know the victory and the joy of the Resurrection.

My friend looked at a little child playing where many suffered and died. He said :

'It's another world - isn't it?'
