

**OT: Wisdom 6. 12-16**  
**NT: I Thessalonians 4. 13-end**  
**G: Matthew 25. 1-13**

**For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.**

On 11 November 1918, Private Arthur Wrench of the Seaforth Highlanders wrote in a letter home.

“To think poor brother Bill paid the price of patriotism so soon! I wonder what thanks he will get for it – and we who survive too.

The celebrations here were a riot of enthusiasm – it is pandemonium, and I am sure we must all be mad – but while we are letting ourselves get loose, it is certain that each one of us has time to give a thought of regret for our late pals who have ‘gone west’ and have not been spared to go mad like us. It is yet to be seen whether the price they have paid will be in vain or will be truly honoured and appreciated.

I think it is quite hopeless to describe what today means to us all. We, who will return to tell people what war really is, surely hope that I am this day will be of great significance to generations to come.

Surely this is the last war that will ever be between civilized nations.”

Words written by a young man who had witnessed untold horrors and personal loss, words written of a hope that the great war, the war to end all wars would be just that, but as we come together this morning to remember, we know sadly that those hopes have not yet come to reality.

In each of the 105 years since the Armistice was signed, and in the years since the Cenotaph in Whitehall was unveiled and the Unknown Warrior was buried in Westminster Abbey, war has continued across the world and for millions of people since that first armistice war has not been a part of history but a part of their daily lives and this year more than ever before we know that thousands are dying in the continuing wars in Ukraine, in Israel and Palestine. And in untold wars across the world children, the young and the old are dying, even as we come together this morning to remember, many more are dying.

And so, we come this morning to pause, to remember and to commit ourselves to peace. It is vitally important that we come to remember for ourselves the dreadful cost of war if we are ever to live in peace. Some of you will have a personal memory of losing a member of your own family or friend, but for many of us it will be an inherited memory, passed on from one generation to the next. Remembrance.

The most compelling outward sign of our remembrance is the simple red flower, the Flanders Poppy. It has become the symbol of the Royal British Legion, but more than that, across the world, it has come to represent the sacrifice made by all those men, women and children who have given their lives in conflict.

From early history flowers have become symbols. But how was the poppy chosen as the universal symbol of remembrance? As you might expect, it began with a death. During the early days of the Second Battle of Ypres a young Canadian artillery officer, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, was killed on 2 May 1915 in the gun positions near Ypres. An exploding German artillery shell landed near him.

He was serving in the same Canadian artillery unit as a friend of his, the Canadian military doctor and artillery commander Major John McCrae. As the brigade doctor, John McCrae was asked to conduct the burial service for Alexis because the chaplain had been called away somewhere else on duty that evening. It is believed that later that evening, after the burial, John began the draft for his now famous poem "In Flanders Fields".

Reflecting the scene around him, he wrote:

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place, and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow.  
In Flanders fields.*

McCrae himself was unhappy with the poem and he threw it aside, but one of McCrae's fellow officers found it and was so touched that he sent the poem to England where it was eventually published in the magazine Punch. As a result, the scarlet poppy quickly became the symbol for the soldiers who died in battle.

In 1921, the British Legion began the Poppy Day Appeal to raise money for poor and disabled veterans, and now the Poppy campaign is the Royal Legion's most important activity. The appeal continues to raise the funding needed to help all servicemen and women and their families in the most practical way. However, critically, the appeal serves to maintain our awareness of our past, and present, in order that our prayers for peace, and the future of our families, will be fulfilled.

Mankind's history records much violence, many wars and countless deaths. 2023 will be marked as a year which has seen the most brutal warfare waged since the Second World War. Yes, it is probably true that there has never been a time when conflict has not existed somewhere in the world, yet is it sufficient for us to remember and to accept that it will always be so or should we do more. Should we desire peace with all that we have, as our reading from the book of Wisdom asks.

*“Wisdom is radiant and unfading,  
and she is easily discerned by those who love her,  
and is found by those who seek her.  
She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.”*

Jesus was born into an occupied land, and he lived and died in that land. The Jews were waiting for their king, the Messiah, and they expected him to overthrow the Roman invaders by the traditional, violent, means.

Peace was not on the agenda in those New Testament times. Jesus came and taught peace to the disciples and anyone who would hear him, he said, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.”*

The message that Jesus carried did not suit the Pharisees and religious leaders because he threatened the status quo, and anyway he did not fit their idea of the anticipated mighty and all-conquering Messiah. The local Roman authorities were worried that any unrest would reflect badly on them. They wanted a quiet life; peace on their terms was just fine. So Jesus, the light of the world, died for us in an act of utmost darkest violence and yet that led to life, the resurrection and as Paul writing to the church in Thessalonica says *‘life for all who have died in Christ.’*

Peace is a precious commodity; it comes from trust, patience, tolerance, and faith. It is not unilateral, it cannot be “*peace only on my terms*”, it results from mutual agreement and understanding. Peace has never been easy to achieve; it is very hard work to establish and keep the peace at any level in our society. Yet regardless of the difficulties, peace must be what we all strive for. The driving force for peace must come from us, it must come from our remembrance of those who have given their lives in war; it must come from those injured in conflict and for their families and loved ones. Peace will not come if we forget; it won't happen if we wait for others to work for it. It is through our vigilance, our voice, and our prayers that peace and light will emerge.

The Poppy is our symbol of Remembrance, let us remember through the remembering of pain and loss that there is always the light of hope that faith can bring, and this morning, let each of us renew afresh our commitment to be that light.

**Fr Bill Addy**