

The Year of the Word: Reflection 10

In his VE Day Speech Winston Churchill said:
 "We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing, but let us not forget for a moment the toil and efforts that lie ahead."



On our journey with God, our life adventure, God calls each one of us by name to our vocation. Our vocation is never for ourselves, and no matter what our family and friends' reaction may be, the best thing to do is keep your gaze on Jesus, confide in Him and draw support from those that He brings into our lives or events that He puts us in. It will not be an easy journey - there will be times of hardship and sacrifice but ultimately it will be worth it because Jesus died to set us free and bring us redemption, so that we are able to live in OUR Father's House for all eternity.

Through Jesus' death, we have been given a choice as to what we make of our lives, But God calls us to himself through our vocation, so that we can make our world a better place and we can give glory to God who made us in His own image and gave us life. It is us ourselves, with our unique strengths and weaknesses, gifts and talents that God needs to keep mankind free from any bonds of captivity. It is who we are, in whatever shape or form that God is able to work through if we let Him.

With Jesus' death, a new world, more beautiful than the last, was born. Mankind was freed from captivity in any form. We were given liberty and freedom. Yet through History, just as with Adam and Eve with Satan in the Garden of Eden, there have been times and individuals, who have tried to take away that liberty, freedom and our civil rights in a bid to have ultimate power.

The end to one such challenge is marked this weekend with the 75th Anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day in 1945. This marked the formal acceptance of Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender by Britain and its Allies following almost six years of WW2. VE Day was a celebration but also a moment of great sadness and reflection, as millions of people had lost their lives or loved ones in the conflict. The occupation of countries like France would be a distant memory, as would the bloody brutality of battles such as the Normandy Landings. But we owe the greatest debt of thanks to the brave men (and on some occasions, women) who defended our liberty. Extraordinary events created extraordinary people.

Liberty, freedom and civil rights were three things that the people of Nazi Germany did not have. Though the Nazis covered up their tyranny through stylish propaganda and the guise of economic stability after a period of turbulence, we cannot pretend that Hitler and his minions were anything but fascist and deeply authoritarian in their actions and ideology. Any criticism was swiftly crushed, and that was sadly not the worst of it. Anyone who did not conform would not be allowed into society. Even those who were seen as the perfect Aryans did not enjoy political freedom, a right to one's own body (abortion was either forced or completely prohibited) or any of the things we enjoy today. Sadly, there was worse. Whether Jewish, Gypsy, homosexual, or another race, the list of 'sins' on the Nazi list was endless. Though the horrors of the camps were not truly known until after the war- even amongst Germans- it would be one where the blood of the victims stained history. The Holocaust victims were more than just statistics; they were the victim of cold blooded mental, physical and emotional torment.

In that way, soldiers weren't the only heroes of VE Day. Everyone who fought against the Nazis by protecting Jews and other victims, whether by passive resistance or open defiance, was a contributor to VE Day. Israel has thousands people registered as 'Righteous Among the Nations,' those who risked their lives to prevent others from losing theirs. We cannot forget them.

Of course, however, we mainly associate the military with VE Day, and it is primarily a day for remembering those who defended their nations. Throughout the British Commonwealth- everywhere from the middle of London to those in Calcutta, millions of men and boys volunteered to stand against evil. Some lied about their ages; others hid medical conditions in desperation to serve. When they could not stand on the front line, they were the doctors, cooks and ambulance drivers who kept the whole operation running. Boys as young as sixteen were willing to be shot out of the sky for God, King and Country, willing to be laid to rest without so much as having kissed a girl. They may not have known about the evils of the Holocaust, but they knew that they were fighting against something on the wrong side. Across the world, families received telegrams, informing them that their son had been killed in action. Through the anguish and the grief, only part of their heart would be filled by the knowledge that they were heroes.

Let us not forget the women either: Without the Rosie Riveters who assembled the bullets, the regular women who raised war bonds or the nurses who tended the wounds of the injured, many more lives- civilian or otherwise- would have been lost.

Out of VE Day came an extraordinary new world. This post-war age is not perfect- look at leaders like Franco and Ceauşescu, or massacres such as that of Bosnian Muslims- but it would have not come about without the sacrifice and bravery of millions of quite ordinary people. In every European country, bar the Vatican (which doesn't have voting as we know it); women have equal access to the ballot as men. The discrimination of certain groups may occur; but it is rare and is thankfully not tolerated by the masses. Personal autonomy, political freedom and just basic human rights are now afforded to the vast majority of citizens.

Churchill is often quoted because of the depth and memory attached to his speeches. In one such memorable speech, the British Bulldog said: 'Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, This was their finest hour.'

And it was - It truly was, until recent events, when once again those following their vocation have stepped forward to defeat an enemy and we have all been asked to play our part and trust that all will be well. So, marking the 75th Anniversary will be all the more poignant this year; as despite the best laid plans celebrations have had to be changed in the current climate. Then, as now, it is about community spirit - Keep calm and Carry on! The theme of Holocaust Day this year was Stand Together and while we can't do that physically, we can in spirit. We can stand together in remembrance and thanksgiving, against hatred and prejudice and for building stronger communities. We can remember the recent dead and give thanks for the new wave of heroes that have stepped forward, we can reflect that together we really are stronger and it is an opportunity for rebirth once again, so that we have the chance to change and make sure that God's will is done on Earth as it is in Heaven for the repose of our souls and the souls of all those who have gone before or are yet to come.

God bless us all!



Readings for Reflection from the Gospels

Mt 11: 5

Mt 12: 18

Jn 10:1-10 - Jesus offers the promise of fullness of life in him.
 Jn 14:1-12 - Heaven is our true home; All our life is preparation for that place of security and peace where God waits for us.



Friday 8th May 2020: United together to remember the past, we pay tribute to the Second World War generation and honour our heroes both then and now.

Join the Tommy in the Window Campaign of the Royal British Legion to pay tribute to all those who fought and died in WW2 and to support current veterans and Service



Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 where there is injury, pardon;
 where there is doubt, faith;
 where there is despair, hope;
 where there is darkness, light;
 and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
 to be consoled as to console;
 to be understood as to understand;
 to be loved as to love.
 For it is in giving that we receive;
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
 and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

