

Sunday 26 April 2020: Lest We Forget

A sermon preached by the Dean of Melbourne, the Very Revd Andreas Loewe, at St Paul's Cathedral on the Third Sunday of Easter.

Readings: [Micah 4.1-4](#); [Romans 5.1-11](#); [John 15.9-17](#)

'Lest we forget', we are encouraged at this time. 'Lest we forget' to remember the acts of war, conflict and terror of the past. 'Lest we forget' to remember the service of courageous and selfless people of the past and the present. 'Lest we forget' to remember that people still give their lives so that we may live in safety and security – as tragically happened in our own city of Melbourne this week, when four police officers were killed during a routine traffic patrol on the Eastern Freeway.

This season charges us to an active remembrance, in the hope that we might learn from the tragedies of the past, and actively search for ways to peace and reconciliation. It charges us to an active remembrance of the sacrifices made by past generations, in the hope that we might actively strive to be a more generous society in future. It charges us to an active remembrance – not to frighten us or dismay us, but rather to encourage us in hope-filled living as we face the challenges of our own day. 'Lest we forget' encourages us to remember that the challenges of today were faced, and lived through, in past generations by people like you and me.

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Our second reading, from Paul's epistle to the Romans, tells of what happens when we engage in active remembrance. Paul encourages the church, in the city in which he gave his own life, to hold fast to their story of faith. When you feel far away from God because of division, hardship and sin, remember that you were once estranged from God, he tells them. Remember your suffering because suffering produces endurance. Do not be overwhelmed by suffering, Paul tells the Romans. Rather, recall the times of hardship as a reminder that you have already lived through them, and so become more resilient. Remember the sufferings of the past, Paul tells, not as a tragic event but as a symbol of hope that we will master the challenges of living: 'We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character and character produces hope'. Recall the past in order to face the future with hope, Paul tells the people of Rome and us with them.

The ability for hope-filled living in the challenges of the present, Paul knows, does not spring from our own endurance. The reason why we may have hope in the first place is 'because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us'. We may have hope for the future, Paul reminds the Romans, not because of anything we do, but what we believe. Because the remembrance that Paul charges the Romans to practise is the reminder that in whichever situation we may find ourselves, the very Spirit of God dwells in us to sustain and support us. We may have hope, because we know ourselves to be people in whom God's Spirit dwells. We may have hope, because we know ourselves to be people

who have peace with God. Whatever may happen around us – whether we find ourselves at war, facing acts of terror, or combatting a global pandemic – we know ourselves to be at peace with God. And in that knowledge rests our hope. Through that hope our endurance is strengthened, and we may be upheld in our suffering.

The way in which that peace that we enjoy with God has come about, Paul tells, is the 'supreme sign of love' that the world has seen. It is the sacrifice that has inspired much sacrificial living and dying since. 'While we are still weak', living estranged from God and burdened by sin, 'at the right time Christ died for the ungodly'. God's own Son, Jesus, gave his life so that all people may have life. Christ's sacrifice was for all people, Paul reminds the Romans. 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends', Jesus had told his disciples on the night before he gave his own life, both for his friends and for his enemies.

'God proves his love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us'. Jesus died not only for his friends but also for his enemies. That is why our active remembrance of Jesus' death is so important: because God's love, unlike our own, knows no boundaries; because God's sacrifice is gifted to his friends as well as his enemies, is given freely to those who loved Jesus and mourned his death, as it is to people like Paul himself, who began his life as an enemy of Christ, and a persecutor of all who proclaimed the message of the resurrection. Perhaps it is out of his own experience as someone who actually lived as an enemy of Christ, that Paul is able to be so clear about the enormity of the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross.

This weekend we recall those who gave their lives so that we may have the freedoms we enjoy – people who died because they served their country and its citizens, people who laid down their lives for their friends. We pause and remember, are charged to a perpetual remembrance – 'lest we forget' – because the act of giving a life for one's friends is already so extraordinary, so costly. But Paul tells us that the act of love that gives hope for endurance in every generation is even greater. We pause each year to remember those who died for good people. But Christ died for his enemies: 'Rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us'. While we were still enemies of Christ, sinners who loved him not, he gave his life for us so that we, his enemies, might live at peace. That is a sacrifice worth pausing what we do, and recalling with thanksgiving.

Because of Christ's death for friends and enemies, we are promised peace beyond all understanding, Paul tells us. This is a fundamental peace, 'peace with God', brought about by the sacrifice that has transformed all other sacrifices of lives, gifted in service of our fellows since, into reminders of the gift of life that Christ has given us. The peace we enjoy with God gifts us hope for living courageously and selflessly, Paul tells us. 'If while we were God's

enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, we will be saved by his life'.

It is this certainty, the knowledge that our lives are safe with God regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, that gifts us the strength for living day by day, and inspires us to offer ourselves, our lives and bodies to be living sacrifices; reminders in our own bodies of the gift of peace and life that is forever, the gift wrought for us 'through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation'.

Why do we pause to remember, and promise not to forget? Paul would say that we do so in order to remind ourselves of the source of all life, and all sacrificial living; to recall in our own living and our dying that 'God proves his love for us, in that while we still sinners, Christ died for us'. Why do we promise not to forget? In order to remind ourselves of the lasting peace that still eludes us, and to recommit ourselves to our own work for reconciliation in the certainty that 'we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Why do we pause to remember, and promise not to forget? In order to remind ourselves of the great love of God that has been poured into our hearts; to remember when we experience hardship and suffering that God's Holy Spirit will empower and resource us; will gift us words of courage and faith-filled prayer when our own words fail; will strengthen us in our weakness. Why do we pause to remember and promise not to forget? In order to remind ourselves of the greatest sacrifice, that of God's Son Jesus.

Lest we forget that Jesus gave us grace unbounded by dying for his enemies. Lest we forget that Jesus showed forth greater love by laying down his life for his friends. Lest we forget that he is the source of our hope that you and I may share in the glory of God with all those who have reflected in their lives the suffering, endurance and character that flows from the cross. Lest we forget that Jesus died and rose again so that we may be saved forever by his life. Lest we forget that he will come again in glory to make this world the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. Amen.