

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.*

What does Remembrance Day mean to you? For some who lost loved ones in the wars of recent times it will have very special memories, but for most of us it's a very necessary reminder of the suffering and sacrifice by ordinary men and women in the interests of their nation and its cherished values. We commemorate this unique event every year. Perhaps we should pause to ask the question "Why?"

The trouble is we forget so soon. That's why even small communities have a cenotaph; that's why we wear our poppies as a reminder, so that each generation should not forget what was done on their behalf. These memorials are there to help us to remember; they are there as visual aids to remind us of how, in the mercy of God, we've been delivered from tyranny ... "lest we forget."

Our Gospel passage today assures us that those who have died, will be raised up on the last day and have eternal life. At least we know that loved ones who died are with Jesus in heaven. We will not forget them, they did not die in vain, and they are in heaven. Comforting words to those who are sorrowful.

The Israelites had a problem of forgetfulness of their freedom from tyranny, in the same way that we do. They, too, had passed through a great liberation experience. The story is well known. They had become enslaved in Egypt and were enduring harsh treatment as forced labour. Jehovah, the God of their forefathers, heard their cries of misery and desperation.

Moses was chosen by the Lord to lead the people out of Egypt in a great national deliverance that we know as the Exodus. But incredible as it seems, they were so caught up with the minor difficulties of the journey that they soon forgot that wonderful day of their deliverance from their enemy, by the hand of Jehovah. They forgot that they had an obligation to God, who had so miraculously saved them from a life of slavery. How like human nature to be ungrateful.

Remember how God had given Moses that moral code we know as the Ten Commandments. In the years that followed he often repeated them in stirring addresses to the young nation, and there we find the words: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (Deut. 5:15). The call is to "Remember". That's why Remembrance Day is so important; it's kept year after year so that we can have the opportunity to reflect on its significance.

The Israelites were to "remember" the past so that they might be better in the present and the future.

At all costs they were to "remember" what they were. They were slaves. God had done something wonderful for them; he had liberated them. It wasn't something they had accomplished by their own efforts. They were entirely dependent on someone else's intervention on their behalf. They were indebted to God for what he had done.

We here are probably not old enough to have wartime experiences, but you may have heard stories from parents or grandparents. People of many countries, occupied by hostile forces, were reduced to slavery, compelled to work under grim conditions. Others, more fortunate, were not slaves, but were captives in their own countries, enduring a virtual imprisonment under armed guard. Others served in the Forces and were captured as prisoners. It still happens today. We do well to remember them.

Captivity or worse takes place, not only in a physical sense, but, even worse, spiritually as well. We all know from our own experience that we are fallen beings. All of us have fallen short of God's high standard. The basic tragedy of humanity is that the people who were created by God, and for God, should now be living without God. We have all in some ways, fallen into ways that are far from God's ideal for us.

If we're honest, we're all captives in spirit in the same way as the Israelites and those caught up in war situations. But thank God the story doesn't end there, as we follow the instructions of Moses to call for remembrance.

In the blessing of freedom that we enjoy, the call comes again to "remember": "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this." One of the saddest moments in the Gospels is pictured in the words of Jesus when he said, "Where are the nine?" He was asking what had happened to the nine men who had known such wonderful release from the misery of leprosy and had forgotten to come back and say, "Thank you, Lord." Only one thanked him.

Immediately after World War II ended, churches were full of thankful people, but the sense of thankfulness soon faded. Many people experienced their "exodus" of freedom from the fear of the oppressor and entered their "promised land", but many forgot their deliverer. Let's determine with God's help to make this Remembrance Day a milestone when we:

- Remember with gratitude those who made our deliverance possible.
- Rejoice in our freedom and prosperity.
- Reaffirm our commitment to live responsibly.
- Renew our faith in God.

Above all, let us remember our Gospel passage. Jesus tells us that he will never lose anyone who God has given him. We will forever belong to Jesus. And Jesus assures us that on the last day, he will raise up everyone he has been given, and they will have eternal life. That is God's will. We remember those words with gratitude, and we are comforted.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN

*Credit (parts of) to Owen Bourgaize, 2000*