

Malachi 4:1-2a; Ps 98; 2 Thess; Luke 21:28

Last Sunday was Remembrance Sunday. I did not specifically talk about it, because it was the Feast of Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, and I directed my thoughts towards that. However, I am going to speak now with Remembrance Sunday and Armistice day, now, as a back-drop.

Every year around this time I find myself repeating the same words, from *Second Vatican Council's pastoral constitution "Gaudium et spes"* (*Joys and hopes*). Either I lack imagination or they are worth repeating: I hope it is the latter:

Peace is not the mere absence of war or the simple maintenance of a balance of power between forces, nor can it be imposed at the dictate of absolute power. It is called, rightly and properly, a work of justice.... the human will is weak and wounded by sin; the search for peace therefore demands from each individual constant control of the passions, and from legitimate authority's untiring vigilance.

Even this is not enough. Peace here on earth cannot be maintained unless the good of the human person is safeguarded, and men are willing to trust each other and share their riches of spirit and talent. If peace is to be established it is absolutely necessary to have a firm determination to respect other persons and peoples and their dignity, and to be zealous in the practice of brotherhood.

... Peace on earth, born of love for one's neighbour, is the sign and the effect of the peace of Christ that flows from God the Father....¹

The teachings of '*Gaudium et spes*' are broad and varied. But fundamentally it talks of the conversion of the individual human heart

necessary to bring peace. This requires a conversion - a turning back from the direction we are headed.

Violence is all around us. War in the Ukraine, in the Middle East, in Central and the Horn of Africa. There are violent disturbances in Latin America, and Asia, where many nations are in a state of semi-war against their neighbour, armed factions, drug cartels and organised crime. The Western nations are almost all increasing their spending on their militaries in. Moreover, there are the more systemic threats to democracies, particularly in the West: the loss of faith in law, the abandonment of a common understanding of right and wrong, and even an understanding of the concept of truth itself. (The damage is not just moral, it is in the bodies of aborted babies who are our future hope, and the threat to the elderly who are our past history. We have killed far more of our own children than have ever died in war, almost at a 5 to 1 ratio.) In the midst of this, I hear the voices of those who have told me they have lost their faith. 'How could a loving God allow these things to happen?' they often say. Well, I am surprised that there is as much good in the world as there is, and amazed at the shining instances of good that have not been overwhelmed by evil. The perseverance of good, this is why I believe in the loving God.

I encounter this through the eyes of the poet David Jones who served in the trenches in the First World War.² There he experienced something that transformed him while traveling back from the bloodied mud of the front line: he chanced upon the celebration of a Catholic Mass. After the war he converted to Catholicism and he wrote a long

¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, Chap V. Fostering of Peace and the Establishment of a Community of Nations. Nature of Peace 78.

² David Jones, <http://www.arduity.com/poets/jones/theanathemata.html>, accessed 07/11/2019

poem entitled *The Anathemata*. *Anathemata* means 'curses'. It is a demanding and complex poem, but *The Anathemata* encompasses the entire history of mankind in the setting of the Consecration of the Mass: when bread and wine become Body and Blood. The response to the man-made curses of hatred is the gift of redemption which we receive at the Mass. In the poem The Host is elevated in the trenches, in encampments, on ships and airfields, in a moment of snatched peace, among the torn limbs and suffering, despair, economic bleakness, and commercial despair, at home and on the world's horizon. It is the face of Christ who speaks to us and whom we are called to encounter. The Host is not - whatever people may have told you - held up from the meal table in the upper room of the Last Supper, but from the cross on Mount Golgatha: 'The place of the skull'. It is from here that Jesus gazes is pain and love upon the world, calling upon it to look back upon Him. If we are in a wretched state it is because we will not raise our heads to see.

*'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great famines and pestilences.... But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you.... This will be your opportunity to bear witness.'*³

This is the reality of the Christ of peace who wills to raise us up. It is Christ among the poppies of *the Anathemata*. He is the Blessing of God amongst the world's curses. He is our Hope, not because things are going well, but because he has the cure to our hopelessness. Christmas – The Son of God coming into the world - is God's call to us to turn back to him. Use it well.

³ Luke 21: 10-12