

Sermon, Service of Thanksgiving & Remembrance,

Quairading, York, Beverley & Brookton, 5th and 12th November, 2023

Underpinning and enclothing our Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance in which we give thanks for the witness of All Saints and All Souls over the centuries, the dedication and sacrifice of those who fought for peace, justice and security, and for God's generosity in a good season, is the fact that our greatest sense of thanksgiving and remembrance is due to the life, witness and person of Jesus Christ who came for our redemption and our reconciliation to God.

As we recall all those who have died in the Faith of Christ, we need remind ourselves that the source of their exemplary lives, often unknown to us, comes from the way in which they sought to emulate Christ in their lives. For some this will have seemed easier than others – those who lived through times of persecution will seem more dedicated and remarkable. Certainly, we cannot but be impressed by those who have been martyred, often in horrendous circumstances, for their Faith. In many ways you might suggest that we live in a time when our Faith stands tested, for while we are unlikely to be imprisoned or killed for our Faith, our urgency and faithfulness in proclaiming the Good News for all can be stifled by the indifference and disinterest we meet; such indifference and disinterest is often harder to deal with, for there is no desire to argue or contest: “You are welcome to your beliefs, me to mine” mentality. Or sometimes more irritating – I’m not religious, but I’m spiritual, whatever that can mean! You will all be aware of these responses with which we are greeted that are saying in effect “do not bother me”. In other words, there do not seem to be many Greeks around as St Paul found who wish to discuss and argue about matters of the Divine! Whatever this indifference and disinterest let us remember the Great Commission we have, to go and make disciples of all nations baptising them, and be uplifted and encouraged in the knowledge and certainty that Jesus says he will be with for eternity!

It is the nature of our society that those who have lost their lives in warfare for Australia are well remembered and thanked. You might contend that ANZAC Day is our National Day, whatever you make of Australia Day, and that it is an expression of Civic Religion, albeit tinged with Christian rituals and expression, and which was originally the brainchild of Christian leaders who sought to make sense of war for a nation, and for the need for peace to be always our aim and aspiration. This peace St John suggests is about loving your neighbour so much that as with Jesus Christ you would lay down your life for them. This loving one another as Jesus loves us makes for no definition of whom is the other. Indeed, the Christian Gospel would exhort us to love our enemies as our neighbours for all are children of God. As we take the opportunity to remember those involved in war over the decades, the centuries and in our own time, and not least remembering those who gave their lives, we do well to recall that war involves all God's children, whatever their belief or attitude. Might our Remembrance Day prayers be for peace, that peace of God which in passing all understanding, keeps our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God.

Our final thanksgiving relates to remembering that while we might count ourselves good farmers, great users of chemicals and fertilisers, or great home gardeners, producing lovely shrubs and flowers or an array of vegetables, we do this only as partakers in God's good creation. It is to God the Creator that we owe our thanksgiving, and despite our confidence in our own growing abilities, we are only successful because God has provided the creation in which we are called to use our skills, and then for the betterment of all humanity. When we fail to be cognisant of this, we not only dishonour God and his Creation, but our arrogance also causes us to deify ourselves, thereby losing any sense of humility, grace, and concern for our neighbour – the hungry, the thirsty and the needy.

Let it be our prayer that as we members of the Avon Valley, worship at this Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance, we will recognise and proclaim our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as the source of all goodness and growth, that in all we do and are, we may use his gifts to his glory and the welfare of all people.