



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A
Remembrance Sunday

Readings: Wisdom 6: 12-16, Ps 62, 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18, Matthew 25: 1-13

Today is Remembrance Sunday when we traditionally recall the sacrifice of the lives that were lost in the wars of our nation. For a few moments we pause to remember what, in truth, we never knew and reflect on the precious gift of a lifetime largely undisturbed by the cruelties of war. Our focus is historically narrow. The wars of the 20th Century loom large. We do not, for example, mention the Boer War, The Crimea, the Hundred Years War, the great victory at Stamford Bridge and the subsequent disastrous defeat at Hastings. The point and purpose of this remembrance is to give thanks to God for those who gave their all their tomorrows for our today and to commit ourselves, wherever possible, to the path of peace and reconciliation.

It is now over thirty years since I stood on the heights of Hertzl on the western flank of Jerusalem and wandered through the rooms of Yad Vashem. The buildings whose name means simply 'A Name and a Memorial' is the Museum of the Holocaust. Two memories remain with me to this day. A little room containing a pile of shoes, unintentionally bequeathed by

those who would no longer need them as they were herded into the tunnels of Zyklon B's lethal poison before being incinerated.

The other is the memorial of the children. The darkened hall resonates to the drumbeat of a still small voice reciting the name of every victim as the photograph of each murdered child comes into central view. It is the record of the demonic insanity of the anti-semitism that has so often gripped our continent and found its apogee in the bitter manifesto of the National Socialists and the twisted ambitions of the little corporal.

I was reminded of this last week when sitting in the bar of a local club and listening to a debate on the current war in the Holy Land. A bar-room philosopher was explaining to the assembled crowd how it was, in fact, the Jews who were conducting a campaign of genocide in the current campaign. No mention was made of the provocative acts of the glorious 'freedom fighters' of Hamas in the mass slaughter and abductions of civilians that had triggered the present bloody engagement.

The barmaid whispered to me, 'Why do people always hate the Jews so much?' It was a good question, not least because Europe has so often been disfigured by its anti-semitism. It is a prejudice not wholly absent from the Church. I have encountered Catholic conspiracy theorists who blame just about everything on the Jews. My own experience of living in a heavily Jewish parish is that most Jews are no better or worse than their Gentile neighbours.

Be that as it may, we are now in the grip of a new wave of the dangerous manipulation of history. For Christians, it is vital to understand the background to the present conflicts. The wars of Palestine/Israel date back three thousand years. They are to be read up in the conflicts of the Old Testament between the settlers of the land in the wake of the Hebrew liberation from Egypt and the waves of invaders from the Sea Peoples, amongst whom were the Philistines. The survival of a distinct Jewish people after the division of the kingdom and the crushing defeats by the Assyrians and then the Babylonians, was little less than a miracle. The failure of the revolt from Rome and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, led to the longest exile in the history of Man. The restoration of the Jewish State in 1948, at the end of the British Mandate, which had governed Palestine after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, was in accord with the United Nations unworkable two-state solution. The UN saw the re-establishment of Israel as a final solution to the FINAL SOLUTION – a place where Jews could live in safety. The Arab nations rejected it. The Islamic authorities rejected it. It is worth noting that, throughout the Second World War, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem sat in Berlin, egging Hitler on in his plan for the extermination of the Jews. The Grand Mufti's chosen protégé was one Yasser Arafat. Scarcely had the State been born than the first of three wars to destroy the nascent State was unleashed by the surrounding Arab powers. The redrawing of the map came in the wake of the 1967 war when it became apparent that future security rested on the new boundaries established on the Golan Heights, the Gaza and the West Bank and the unity of Jerusalem. The politics remain complex. The theology, for followers of Christ, rests on the promise of the chosen – ness of the Jewish people which, as St Paul has been reminding us over the last couple of weeks in his letter to the Romans, has not been revoked nor will be. As followers of Christ we will not applaud

injustice by any state, Palestinian, Jewish or whomsoever. We will seek reconciliation and peace between the warring factions. We cannot conflate the deaths of the innocent under the lazy euphemism of 'collateral damage', never mind condone the deliberate and pre-meditated murder of civilians. But we cannot and will not tolerate a recrudescence of the Jew – hatred that informs much of the politics of the culture of that region and has begun to re-infect our own continent.

In the final days of my Holy Land Pilgrimage, I was taken to the desert fortress of Masada, long besieged and the last stronghold to fall to the Roman war machine in the Jewish Revolt of AD 70. On these sacred heights, the initiation of each warrior to the Israeli Defence Forces ends with the oath of Loyalty and the shout, 'MASADA SHALL NOT FALL AGAIN'.

Understanding our theology requires us to understand our history.

Remembrance is at the heart of that wisdom just as Remembrance is at the heart of the celebration of the Mass and the induction of the eternal kingdom of reconciliation and peace.

We weep at the grave of every Lazarus, our friend and brother, yet we know that, as the dawn rises on the farther shoreline we will meet again in the eternal life of the Risen Christ. In this season of the dead we, the dying, must redouble our prayers for those who have gone before and more especially for our fellow mortals who, as yet without Christ, will die without hope.

The mission goes on.

It is not an optional extra. It is a matter of life or death.