

Sunday, November 12th. 2023. Advent – 3. Remembrance Sunday

Wisdom of Solomon 6.12-16, Psalm 70, Matthew 25.1-13

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In Grenoble, there is a small resistance museum in the city centre, which I once visited. Inside, there were all sorts of memorabilia of war, guns, flags and other pieces of equipment. I remember a huge flag with a swastika hanging on the back wall. But just before the exit, pinned to a wall, were some letters. I read part of one of them, a letter from a young man of 19 to his parents. He was in the French Resistance. The letter began, Chère maman, cher papa, It is now 10 o'clock in the morning, I am writing to you for the last time, as I am to be shot at 2 o'clock this afternoon. I couldn't read any more. I staggered out of that museum. A young man, who could have been one of my sixth formers, gave his life for what he believed to be right. By the time that his parents received that letter, I imagine that it would have happened. Can we imagine their grief?

We have to remember that, in what we are doing today, we have to bring the past into the present, because, if we don't, those, who have never experienced war, will not know that can happen. They may not appreciate the value of life and the freedom, which we have. The Kohima Epitaph says, 'When you go home, tell them of us and say, "For your tomorrow, we gave our today."' We have to listen to their stories.

Today's Gospel tells of ten bridesmaids, young people, who have the rest of their lives ahead of them. They are waiting for the bridegroom. They are ready at the start, but half of them run out of oil, and, when they come back from buying some, the bridegroom has already arrived, and they are too late.

The bridegroom is Jesus. Perhaps, if they had admitted their mistake, they could have put their hand in his and have been picked up. When we know that we aren't ready to meet Jesus, rather than running away, we should admit it, swallow our pride and come to him. Jesus takes all our inadequacies, transforms them and helps us to find new life.

Jesus tells us to keep awake. We will never have enough oil, and we can't do this waiting through our own strength.

In Psalm 70, which is very similar to the last part of Psalm 40, the psalmist places himself in the hand of God and prays that joy may reside where it properly belongs, in the company of the faithful worshippers of God, and he says, 'You are my helper and deliverer; O Lord, do not

delay.' This is reflected in the passage from The Wisdom of Solomon, which assures us that, if we are vigilant and really desire to find wisdom, then we will. What is wisdom? It is more than knowledge; it involves humility, the ability to relate to other people, to offer sound advice when needed, to be servants of one another.

How can we honour those, who have given their lives in war? We may think today, not only of the past, but, for example, of Ukraine. Is it not by living as best we can, by loving one another, by putting other people first, by being people of peace, wherever we are, as in Hymn 424:

Send us forth alert and living,
sins forgiven wrongs forgiven,
In your Spirit strong and free.
Finding love in all creation,
bringing peace in every nation,
may we faithful followers be.

The events in Edinburgh recently are not encouraging, fireworks being thrown at the police, general disorder, property damaged. Elsewhere, we see stabbings and abuse on a regular basis.

How can we be ready to meet Jesus Christ? Perhaps by holding up our empty lamps and, like the Psalmist in Psalm 70, trusting God, who calls us to life, new life, in all its fullness, asking us to remember the past and all that is going on around us now, to realise how fortunate we are, to see God in other people, and to try our best to live as he would have us do. In that way, we honour those, whom we commemorate today. They made a difference, and we are called to do the same.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.