

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence – Remembrance 2016

“Let all mortal flesh keep silence.”¹ In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good morning and welcome to St Mary Magdalene Parish Church in Geddington. I am always so heartened to see so many turn out on Remembrance Sunday as we pay our respects to those who have sacrificed their lives in order to secure our freedom both in ages past and present. We stand here as a free nation, and that freedom has come at a great cost to so many. In a few moments we will remember by name all those from this village who are recorded to have given their lives in the two world wars and they stand as a symbol of every life that has been lost protecting us from the ravages of evil and oppression. These are men and women who have fought in the hope that the world may become a better place: a world where every human life is recognised as being of the greatest worth, where the resources of our world are shared so that no one need starve or thirst or die of a curable disease; so that every person may have shelter and no person be the victim of violence, oppression, persecution or manipulation. They died, as Jesus himself died, to help bring heaven closer to earth.

And so, as we look back in fondness and huge gratitude have we continued the work they began? Is our world now less corrupt than it was a year ago, a decade ago or half a century ago? Does every individual now have access to an equal amount of resources? Have we put an end to starvation and homelessness and violence? I fear we have not. But, whilst all of these things may seem insurmountable to us on a personal level, that does not mean that we should give up hope of trying. It was together that those we remember today stood against tyranny and oppression. It is together that we must stand for the same.

In previous years, I have stood here and lamented the wars that we have seen taking place on our TV screens in far off shores; where armies of states and civil movements have wrought great destruction and genocide, and persecuted minorities

¹ Let all Mortal Flesh Keep Silence (Hymn) from Liturgy of St James trans. Gerard Moultrie

with a different colour skin or a different religion. Today I lament a very different plague that seems to be sweeping our world, and most especially the West. A plague of personal and corporate greed, intolerance and elitism, and the frequent comparisons to the 1930's that we have heard these past months are not as far-fetched as some would have us think. Society seems to have lurched in a direction of intolerance, and 2016 has not been a good year for recognising the value of every individual and promoting equality. This year we have seen the poor, the stranger, the foreigner, the refugee, the homeless person all stripped of personal worth in the public arena. And we have seen women treated as nothing more than sex objects to be abused in the presidential campaign of one of the most powerful nations in the world. And if the statistics hold even the slightest amount of truth, this has all given rise to an appalling increase in violence and abuse against minorities and the most vulnerable in our society.

Many commentators have blamed our plight on a lack of courageous and morally sound leadership. But that to me sounds like a cop-out to deflect the need to take personal responsibility. It is just the same as when we blame God for the hurt, violence and abuse humans do to each other – it is an evasion to make us feel better about ourselves and to off-load the responsibility on someone far off. Our society is all too quick to want to throw stones at those it deems to be in charge, but perhaps it needs to stop shirking the blame.

For nine years I worked on the factory floor of an animal feed mill. There, we used to call it slopey shoulder syndrome; when an individual always blamed somebody else for their mistakes. It seems to me that our society has contracted slopey shoulder syndrome. Have you ever thought that maybe we are the ones called to be the role models today?

Each and every one of us are called to be leaders on some level. Leaders in our own homes, leaders on the shop floors of our factories or the offices where we work; leaders in our communities. The everyday decisions we make add up, and they are within our control. So we need to be the leaders. Not managers, but the kind of leaders who help create culture. The first mark of a leader is to take responsibility. So

we need to take responsibility for our own actions and mistakes, even if the rest of society is making them with us. We need to take responsibility for the things we have said and done that have excluded or hurt someone else. It doesn't matter if that person is our next door neighbour or lives half-way around the world. Then we need to improve our culture for the good of ourselves those around us.

So what directs us and gives us the moral grounding to fashion this culture in a positive way?

Commentators often bemoan that our society is in danger of becoming lazy, greedy and self-interested. That it lacks a moral compass that sees beyond individual and corporate greed. Are they correct? Have we ceased see the dignity of each other? Do we no longer recognise the need to share what we have with those who are less fortunate or help those in trouble? I am not so pessimistic. I see goodness in people every day. When I walk around these villages and in Kettering and Corby, I see people, but and large, with good intentions and kindness. But these commentators are right in highlighting to us that we need to be on our guard.

There is no future for us if we cease to hold faith in each other or stop hoping that we can build a better world. That will not happen if we are riddled with self-interest and only help each other out when it suits us. It will not happen if we treat those we dislike as though they are worthless and those less fortunate as though it were their own fault.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have a duty under God to continue to try and create heaven on earth. A place where the earth is cherished and each individual is recognized for their innate value. Jesus Christ came to earth to show us what heaven looked like in each individual. We must live in that model. Christ will give to all faithful people heavenly food. Being faithful to Christ means more than just coming to church, although that is important too. It means living lives of forbearance, forgiveness and love. It means becoming Christ-like. Willing to sacrifice our possessions, our money, our reputation, even our own lives for the good of others.

If we can live the way that Christ laid down, we can continue building the kind of world that is free of oppression and persecution; the kind of world that the people we remember today gave their lives for.

Then, we will see “heaven descend

and rank on rank the host of heaven spreading its vanguard on the way.

And as the light of lights descends from the realms of endless day

the powers of hell will vanish as the darkness clears away.”²

We must hold fast and we must teach our children, what our generation so often seems to forget; faith, hope and love. For a world without these is hell itself and not one of us will escape unharmed.

But a world filled with faith, hope and love is quite a different prospect. A world filled with faith, hope and love would be heaven itself, and it is within our grasp...

It is in this way, that we truly pay respect to those whom we remember today. It is in this way that we can honestly cry, ‘we will remember them’.

“And so, let all mortal flesh keep silence.”³

Amen

² Let all Mortal Flesh Keep Silence (Hymn) form Liturgy of St James trans. Gerard Moultrie

³ Let all Mortal Flesh Keep Silence (Hymn) form Liturgy of St James trans. Gerard Moultrie