



## The Bishop of Ebbsfleet's Pastoral Letter – November 2007

### Remembrance Day

**E**ACH YEAR, as November comes round, we remember not only the faithful departed in general but in particular those who have died serving their country in the armed forces. We remember too civilians who have been victims of conflict.

My generation remembers not only the long processions of maimed and wounded World War II soldiers in the Remembrance Sunday parades of the 1950s but the reaction against Remembrance Sunday in the 1960s. 'Shouldn't we be moving on?', people said. Churches began to stop having Remembrance services and confine themselves to the 'two-minute silence' and a nostalgic hymn or two. Remembrance Day in those days was mostly observed at the war memorial later in the day or at a service down at the British Legion. That has all changed. The Irish troubles, the battle of the Falklands, the wars in the Gulf, the campaign in Afghanistan: the British armed forces have been in battle almost continually for thirty years. Never has Remembrance Day been more poignant. The threat of terror has created a surveillance culture where each of us in towns and cities is caught on camera many times a day. For much of the last 500 years previous generations lived with the fear of invasion from without Our generation lives with the fear of invasion from within: bombs in buildings and on buses.

'Remembrance' is a word with deep Jewish and Christian roots. Jews remember their deliverance from slavery and death and their arrival in the Promised Land. Ancient history, for them, was repeated as the children of the Holocaust generation built a new life in modern Israel. The annual Passover celebration takes on new meaning. Meanwhile we remember the Christian Passover: Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection leads us from slavery to sin and death and to the Promised Banquet of heaven, something we celebrate not only annually at Easter but also in the Mass day by day. Remembrance is our daily bread.

Loss of memory is terrifying both for individuals and for societies. It is our fear of forgetting that leads us to concentrate in history teaching over much on the Second World War. The new generation is not much interested in history, so they say, but at least we make sure they know about Nazism and the Holocaust. Do we teach them, I wonder, enough about Stalin's Russia and the China of Chairman Mao? And what about the history of Islam? On the positive side, do our children learn about the great Islamic civilizations where Christians and Jews had an honoured place? I am not a historian myself but few things are more frightening that the prospect of living in a world that does not know its own history.

'Remembrance' is not just knowing about the past but remembering the past in such a way that we can face the future confidently. Bringing the past into the present can indeed change the future. This is an understanding shared by psychology and is what many forms of psychotherapy try to achieve, in a way not all that different from the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

As we remember the victims of war and make remembrance before God the Father what Jesus did for us on Calvary and does for us in the Eucharist, may God the Holy Spirit form us into agents of his reconciling love.

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