



Fr Kevin Bates' Anzac reflection

This coming weekend we pause to remember and honour all those who served and especially those who sacrificed their lives in war. Their service has resulted in the peace we enjoy today. Most of us living now have not experienced war first-hand, though for some of us Australia's involvement in Vietnam and the Middle East are living memories. Perhaps we know some who have served more recently in Afghanistan.

For many of us we remember family members who served in Korea or during World War 2. We may not know much about their stories as many returned veterans keep their experiences to themselves.

What we do know is that the experience of war changes the lives of those involved, sometimes causing permanent and irreparable damage often with tragic consequences.

It's important that we pause, give thanks and pray for all those who have so bravely served our nation. It's also important that we never take for granted this peace they've enabled for us.

Following involvement in brutal conflict, it's sometimes almost impossible to forgive one's former enemies. I know this to be true from my own extended family's stories. When forgiveness and reconciliation becomes part of the fabric of post-war life, while seemingly improbable it is the most noble face of humanity that emerges.

Marist Father Lionel Marsden was a prisoner of the Japanese and was on the infamous Burma railroad and in Changi prison. Following the war, he determined to go to Japan to begin a mission of reconciliation with the idea of bringing one person to Christ for every person who had died in the war. With two other Marist confreres he and his fellow Marists fulfilled that plan shortly after the war and gave their lives in order to

create healing between the Japanese people and ourselves. Our own Fathers Paul Glynn and his brother Tony were among that early band.

What is in our hearts this Anzac time is important as we remember and pray. Perhaps we could find room there to pray for those on all sides of these conflicts who believed they were giving their lives in causes they saw to be just.

Perhaps too we could give thanks for all those presently serving in the military, ready to make great sacrifices should they be required.

We could do well to reflect on the purpose of the military in the light of recent chilling statements by Assistant Defence Minister Andrew Hastie, reminding military personnel that their “core business” will always be the “application of lethal violence” in order to protect our way of life. Such a statement reveals the ideology of the Dutton/Hastie team, an ideology that raises some serious concern.

Certainly the use of lethal violence may sometimes be required. One would hope however that the core business, the central focus, the clear mission of the military would be the preservation and creation of peace, created in as just a manner as possible. Resorting to lethal violence, rather than being the core business could then be seen to be part of their task only when necessary.

Throw into the mix the gospel of Jesus with his improbable command to love our enemies and to do good to those who hurt us, and as people of faith we have a real conundrum. The Church has long wrestled with the idea of a “just war” and the struggle goes on as our survival needs and our need to remove evil regimes from the earth call on the last reserves of our faith and courage.

We pray for our nation and our human family. As Jesus notes there will always be wars and rumours of wars. It’s our challenge to find responses that are as just and worthy as possible.

In the meantime we continue to give thanks and pray for all those who have made such enormous sacrifices on our behalf and entrust our human family into the arms of God’s infinite mercy.

Lest we forget.

Father Kevin

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