

Remembrance Sunday Sermon 2022, 1 John 3.

Allow me to begin with a light note on this sombre occasion. It is a remark made about the late Queen, Elizabeth II, whose life we gave thanks for only ten weeks ago. One commentator wrote, "She was the most important person in our country, not as important as God, but almost". One of her roles as Queen was as Commander-in-Chief of the United Kingdom's Armed Forces. The President of the Republic of Austria is similarly 'Oberbefehlshaber', the Commander-in-Chief, of the Austrian Armed Forces as defined by Article 80 of the Austrian Constitution.

My father was to serve under the Queen and before her under her father King George VI as a British subject from Liverpool. I was personally delighted when I first visited Christ Church, Vienna after being appointed chaplain to read at the bottom of the middle panel of our majestic stained window flanked by the soldier saints George on your left and Martin on your right that the window was dedicated to the Glory of God and two, it had been given by the regiment of the Eight Army stationed in Vienna at the end of the war my father having served with the Eight Army in North Africa and being at the Battle of El Alemain the turning point of the North African campaign in the Second World War. Was this simply happenstance or providence?

Whether chance or a sign it certainly contributed to having a good feeling about leaving Bonn/Cologne to serve in Vienna. My father received for his efforts during the war: The Defence and the War Medals of 1939-1945, as well as the 1939-1945 Star, the Africa Star and the France and Germany Star, and latterly the Canadian Forces' Decoration Medal all of which he was proud to wear, although he was always painfully aware of the calamity of war and how easily people are led astray by the supposed strong man, a recurring figure in history, who will sort things out and restore some imagined Golden Era...

These musings were occasioned one by wanting to make clear that many of us are personally affected by war in our own biographies. Had it not been for the Second World War there would be no me, as you know me. My wife's uncle died in the Second World War his ship being sunk by a German torpedo. How death remained an ever present reality to the family who knew him even after forty years. The second thing

that brought on these musings was becoming aware of the Royal Army Chaplains' Museum, which has recently been relocated from the village of Amport to Shrivenham in Oxfordshire, England. The new display has shifted the focus away from the heroism of individuals to the beliefs they inhabit. The earliest exhibit on display is of a coin from the Constantinian period, which shows a standard bearing the chi-rho, an early symbol for Christ. Chi-rho are the first two Greek letters for Christ shaped as a cross. The article on Royal Army Chaplains' Museum led me to make a discovery that links us back to St Martin of Tours, who is depicted in the East Window on your left as putting his sword into his scabbard. The discovery was the etymology of the word chaplain something I had not ever thought about much. The origin of the word chaplain and chaplaincy is linked to the famous story attributed to St Martin Tours, who was born some 50 miles from here in Savaria, Pannonia now Szombathely, Hungary. It is the story depicted in the window of St Martin cutting his cloak, his cappella in two and giving half of it to the poor man, who is pleading for mercy as he is freezing... The word chaplain has its origin in the word cappellanus and in time this word changes into chaplain Old French meaning custodian of the cloak of St Martin... We are all to be custodians mindful of the mercy of God that we in turn might be merciful...

Our window tells a story. The two swords, the sword of St George and the sword of St Martin keep before us the need to be on the alert willing to overcome all that is contrary to God's good purposes always mindful of the second sword, which is the sword that is to have priority. The sword we lean into. The sword that we are always working towards, the sharing of resources, the raising up of men and women the world over. It is through the second sword that we do not lose our dignity even in the fight, as we see the other. The second sword pushes away the sin that leads to hate, while heeding the call to be merciful as God has shown in Jesus Christ to be merciful. I well remember trying to expound to a synod, a gathering of laity and clergy that the scales for a Christian and by extension for all human beings is tipped towards pacifism, although most will be aware that there are occasions, a last resort, when the call to arms is not only prudent, but also necessary, but always at a terrible cost... We may often wonder, if the cost was and is worth it... As we examine our hearts and minds... Will we waver?

This takes us to our reading from the First Letter of John today. It is a reading about love. The love that overcomes. The love that overcomes sin and death. At another synod held in Prague only a few weeks ago delegates from our chaplaincies in Kyiv and Moscow were present and were invited to speak about their experience of war in Kyiv and how to live in Moscow in an atmosphere where foreigners and especially British foreigners are mistrusted learning how to speak truth in an environment where truth is officially in short supply and speaking truth in such a way as not becoming a part of the lie.

One of the Moscow delegates as the session drew to a close reminded everyone that Russians and Ukrainians were brothers (*bratskaya lyubov'*, *Bruderliebe*). That there was a bond that could not be severed. In the most forceful and unequivocal terms the Kyiv delegate being a Ukrainian rejected this metaphor maintaining this is not how you treat your brother. You do not wage a war of aggression against your brother, if you are serious about upholding Christian values and maintaining Christian standards.

This exchange is a reminder to us not to claim the kinship of blood, but rather to claim a kinship based in love that 'the bear may lie down with child'. Called instead live the love that goes the extra mile, that turns the other cheek that prays for our enemies out of the life-going source of love, which is a life-giving energy filling all in all: God abundant and overflowing grace. We who gathered to remember loved ones. Some here will have seen active duty and will be reminded of the story of Cain and Abel: a primal myth (in the richest sense of the word) that speaks to us again in our time and that will not leave us alone. It is the love that binds. It is love that seeks a better way.

I began these reflections by reminding us of the Queen's death and above all her example. As Commander-in-Chief she could never be indifferent to the plight of the soldiers, sailors and air personnel under her command. What a weight and what a burden the office of sovereign is to those who understand its gravity. With war looming again and again she will have held all those who were in the battle in prayer knowing that many would not return. Others would be maimed for life, physically, psychologically and spiritually having witnessed first-hand humanity's inhumanity meted out. Families deeply affected even into the third and fourth generation. Against this backdrop she needed to be and was a symbol of understanding, of compassion, of

mercy and of love and as a Christian the supreme love that gives itself for the life of the world. The presence of the Armed Forces throughout the period of our mourning for her should not be understood as a sign of military strength, but as a sign of gratitude and of love for her caring leadership, which finds an echo in many of our homes and relationships. We can learn and will learn much from her example grounded in the love of God, who first loved her. Her faith a source of life and light in the face of the death and its ever present reality.