

VE Day Commemoration 3 May 2020

Welcome, to you all, for this short commemoration marking the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe, when the sounds of war fell silent on this continent. It was to have been a day of joyful gathering, parties and picnics, appropriate to remember the celebrations 75 years ago. We still need to mark the day, not least to remember the many soldiers, sailors, and airmen who gave their lives restraining evil and opposing tyranny. We also need to give thanks for the years of peace that the nations of Europe have enjoyed since the Second World War. We do so conscious of our need for God's forgiveness for the sin and the desire to dominate others that leads to conflict between people, and war between nations. Let's first hold a moment of silence, and then join in our prayers:

SILENCE

Heaviness may endure for a night:

But joy comes in the morning.

God has been our refuge and our strength:

A present help in time of trouble.

O Lord our God, as we remember, teach us the ways of peace. As we treasure memories, teach us to hope. As we give thanks for the sacrifices of the past, help us to make your future in this world, until your kingdom come. Amen.

READING: Zechariah 8.3–8

³Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts shall be called the holy mountain. ⁴Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. ⁵And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. ⁶Thus says the LORD of hosts: Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the LORD of hosts? ⁷Thus says the LORD of hosts: I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; ⁸and I will bring them to live in Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.

REFLECTION

The prophet Zechariah gives a beautiful and hopeful image for his day and for ours. He pictures a day when there will be people on the streets again. The city he spoke about had been ravaged by war, its inhabitants dislocated and its rulers exiled. Even now, after many had returned, it was hard to imagine its old life and vibrancy would return. However, says Zechariah, the Lord promises there will be a day when elderly people with their walking sticks will once more sit outside at their leisure, and the sound of children's laughter will be heard as girls and boys play together in the streets. It will be marvellous, he says, and God will make it happen, because God is faithful and righteous.

There were times in World War II, under the weight of bombardment, that peace must have seemed like an impossible dream, and a rebuilt world too far off to imagine – a futile hope that the darkest hour would ever end. But it did end. V.E. Day did come. There was peace again.

There are probably far too many comparisons being made at the moment between the War and today's situation. War against a disease is not the same as war against another country: for one thing disease is no respecter of borders and has to be tackled on a world scale. Nevertheless, there are connections between then and now. In both cases we speak of and honour the sacrifices made on behalf of the 'many' by the (relatively) 'few'. In both cases, we all need to respond with courage, resilience, public spiritedness, and faith.

On this 75th anniversary, we honour those who fought and died in the fight. We give thanks for the years of peace in Western Europe that we have enjoyed. And we recognise the importance of working continually for peace and reconciliation. Last year I re-visited Coventry Cathedral. The ruins of the bombed-out medieval walls alongside the impressive modern building are an on-going reminder of the destructiveness of war. The cross of charred roof timbers conveys a real poignancy. But Coventry is not about conflict tourism or heritage memorials. From the start, it has been a centre for reconciliation and active peace-making, pioneering the rebuilding of relationships in the post-War world, and then using the lessons to help others in conflict situations around the world. Rebuilding a broken world is as big a task as fighting the war – something it may be useful to remember now.

Today was planned to be a great day of national celebrations – a bank holiday with street parties and mass picnics. Obviously, such gatherings cannot happen, although I am sure people will find creative ways of celebrating in isolation. However we spend today, may we use it to renew visions of hope, maintain resilience in faith, uphold community spirit, and look forward to the day when our streets will be vibrant once more.

PRAYERS: For those who served and died in World War II

O God of truth and justice, we hold before you those men and women who have died in active service, particularly in the Second World War, whose sacrifice brought Victory in Europe. As we honour their courage and cherish their memory, may we put our faith in your future; for you are the source of life and hope, now and for ever. Amen.

For those who serve today

O Lord God of Hosts, stretch forth, we pray, your almighty arm to strengthen and protect our service men and women. Support them in times of conflict, and in their rest and training keep them safe from all evil; endue them with courage and loyalty; and grant that in all things they may serve without reproach; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

For Peace in the World today

Give wisdom to all who work for peace; courage to those who strive for justice; and strength to those who seek to break down barriers; so that all the causes of conflict may be overcome. Grant that wherever war threatens and haunts lives, a way of reconciliation may be found and a spirit of unity established between people and nations. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

The Blessing

God grant to the living, grace; to the departed, rest; to the Church, the Queen, the Commonwealth, and all people, peace and concord; and to us and all his servants, life everlasting; and may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be upon us and remain with us always. **Amen.**