The necessity of sacrifice

Anzac Day 2017

The commemoration of Anzac Day each year is like the Good Friday for our nation. On Anzac Day we acknowledge the sacrifice of those who suffered and died in the service of our nation.

The two great wars of the twentieth century, which largely moulded the spirit of Anzac Day, are now becoming a more and more distant memory. And those directly involved in them are becoming fewer and fewer. Those two great wars were wars to end all wars in that they unleashed levels of human suffering unknown in human history. Millions and millions perished, both combatants and civilians. War was no longer fought by armies but involved whole populations as new means of warfare developed.

In a sense, the culmination of this process was the development of the atomic bomb. War had entered new levels of potential for the destruction of vast numbers of the civil population. War between the great nations had the capacity of destroying whole peoples and leaving a devastated wasteland. Humanity has entered a new and frightening phase in its history.

In this situation the cause of peace takes on an even greater necessity. Restraint and negotiation are now vital in international relations.

Today Australia remembers and honours those who suffered and died in defence of our country’s freedom. We pause in silence – as we will do at the end of this Mass – to remember them.

This day each year reminds us of the notion of sacrifice. That sacrifice is needed to preserve freedom. This is at the heart of the Christian mystery, which we have recalled in recent weeks. Each year on Good Friday we are invited to stand before the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ. On this most holy of days we contemplate the fate of the Son of God who offered his life for the salvation of humanity.

Sacrifice is the Christian way. The Lord explained it as a seed needing to be buried in the ground and die in order that it may sprout forth in new life. What is the ultimate expression of the Christian mystery reveals a profound truth about human life. Sacrifice is the way for the generation of new life.

Every parent know this. Sacrifice is at the heart of true parenthood. This sacrifice, though, is not just an unwanted burden, but it is embraced because of love, love for children who need protection, care and guidance. A parent willingly accepts the sacrifices that are necessary for the good of their children.

Our nation, in order to grow and remain free, needs sacrifice. This sacrifice is expressed in a particular way during times of war, but it is also needed in ordinary times. It is when some citizens are willing to offer their services, their dedication, and their talents for the wellbeing of our society that Australia is able to grow and develop.

Today we remember in a particular way those who serve in our defence forces. We pray that as they discharge their duties they will advance the cause of peace and harmony. We particularly remember those who serve in areas of conflict that they will be protected from harm and be able to return to their families and loved ones.

We pray for peace in the world. Peace among nations and within nations. It is and will remain the duty of the Christian to intercede for peace and be an instrument of peace. We pray that places of conflict will find paths to restore peace and freedom. We remember those innocent citizens who are suffering intensely as they have been caught up in areas of conflict.

Today we remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for their nation. We pray for them and commend their souls to God. Today we also pray for our nation that it may continue to enjoy freedom and prosperity. In asking this, we pray that individual citizens will be willing to offer themselves in generous service for the common good of our nation, Australia.

Archbishop Julian Porteous

Tuesday, 25 April 2017