

Remembrance Sunday

8.00 a.m. BCP

10.11.19

Homily

Luke 20.27-38

Job 19: 23-27a

Job is in despair - in the preceding verses he cries out at having been tormented and broken in pieces - that all his glory is gone, he feels abandoned by God, his family are far from him, he is forgotten and his cries are unheard.

It seems that Job is smashed up, broken in pieces, beyond all human endurance.

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In the Parish Church at Ditchingham in Norfolk, close to where I go for my residential Ordination training, there is the most moving war memorial I have ever encountered. It is not a plaque or a cross; rather it is , and unusually, a life-size bronze statue of a male soldier of the first World War, in British Battle-dress. He lies at waist height, stretched out before you as if on a stretcher, or on a Hospital bed. His eyes are closed, his hands are cold - cold as bronze. But every trace of him as a human being is there. You can - as I do when I visit - run your hands over him: his closed eyes, his nose , his lips, every detail of his uniform, his strong chest, his robust limbs, his feet in Army boots, the curled fingers of his hands.

He is somebody's son, somebody's brother, somebody's husband: perhaps he steered the plough on the land or played cricket for the village.

But now he is still, still in death.

I reflect that when any politician thinks or talks about sending young men and women to war somewhere in the world, whenever anyone contemplates putting someone else in harm's way, they should go to the Parish Church of Ditchingham in the County of Norfolk, and run their hands over that beautiful cold figure, and think about what they are about to do: smash them up.

We are beautifully made. We can run our hands over our own face, stretch out fingers, think of the weight our ankles bear, the scroll work of our ears (as Dorothy L Sayers once described it), the miracle of our cardio-vascular system - the sheer extraordinariness of being alive in all its regulated and balanced chemical, physiological and spiritual way.

It is not a question of who is beautiful or good looking - we are all beautiful.

God has made **all** of us beautiful - "the long and the short and the tall" - as the old soldiers' song has it.

But in war these beautiful people are like Job, smashed up, plucked up, thrown down, lost, betrayed, abandoned, forgotten - like a voice calling out in No-Man's Land, or a prisoner dying of wounds in captivity.

And we wonder where God is in all of that.

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In our Gospel reading, the intrigued Sadducees - perhaps twiggling that there is something about this Jesus of Nazareth - ask him a clever, trick question about the resurrection. The Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection. So they try out a clever-clogs question about the life after death, and how it relates to life before death. They imagine a world where we all just pick up where we left off - married, children, whatever - and ask who belongs to who, like some messy dinner party when the seating plan becomes diplomatically sensitive.

Jesus points out that our notions of the resurrected life are not on point at all. This is not a God of the dead but a God of the living - and the living that is to be is not the living of the age gone before. We shall live again but not as we have lived before.

And Job, despite everything, defies his tormentors by calling back at them that his Redeemer lives, that *after his skin has been destroyed* he will see God, that his eyes shall behold God, and not another.

In Job, and in Luke, we have then this sense that beyond all that we can do to each other there will be in Christ, in death and in life a new life that is beyond our imagining, but a life that is not the life of death. Death is no more.

But in life, when we grieve, hurt, regret and remember those who have died, those who gave everything, those who made sacrifices and were sacrificed for our futures and our todays, we can find it hard to be comforted by those promises.

So God asks us to trust, God asks us to trust - and God asks us to love.

In remembrance we cannot do much better than live each day in this world for those who have left it. If it helps us to remember, we can run our hands over our faces, our limbs, feel our hearts' beating, the rise and fall of our lungs, and remember, for those who are gone, how beautifully we are made - and that our Redeemer lives.

Amen

**Andrew Hurst
Ordinand**