

Remembrance Day 2022

*Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.
May they rest in peace.*

An Empire's Tribute in Silence was the title of an article in one of the major London Newspapers which announced the first anniversary of the Armistice which ended World War I, eleven minutes before 11 o'clock on the 11th day of the eleventh month in the year 1918. This anniversary was called *Armistice Day* and it has been observed as such until the year 1945. Irony of history wants it that already *during* World War II the commemoration of this Armistice "*which stayed the world-wide carnage of the four preceding years and marked the victory of right and freedom*" as King George V had proclaimed in 1919, had been observed on *the Sundays preceding the 11th of November*: to avoid *disruption of the production of war materials*.

One year after the end of the Second World War, the Armistice Day became the *Remembrance Day* and was observed from then on with that name on the *second Sunday in November*. It appears that the Catholic Church played a major role in this process of rebranding the event: It was the then Archbishop of Westminster who had proposed to call today *Remembrance Day* and to include a proper commemoration of all fallen servicemen and - women and their families who had sacrificed their lives for their country during both World Wars. This suggestion made by then Archbishop Bernard William Griffin, was endorsed by the Home Office in January 1946 and in June of that year, the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, said in Parliament that "*the Government felt that this view would commend itself to all quarters of the country. I am glad to say that it has now found general acceptance here and has been approved by The King.*" *The Empire's Tribute in Silence* had become *The Church's Commemoration of the Fallen*.

We believe that this historic angle on today's commemorations is important: Because for Catholics the commemoration of the dead includes much more than only a moment of silence!

The Church announces in today's requiem mass the Epistle taken from the second book of the Maccabees:

In those days: The most valiant man Judas, making a gathering, sent twelve thousand drachmas of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection, for if he had not hoped that they that were slain should

rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead; and because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness, had great grace laid up for them. It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.

If already that Jerusalem which was a prefiguration of the Church announced the hope of the resurrection of the dead, our confidence in today's sacrifice of the Mass must be infinitely stronger; infinitely because each Mass is an infinite source of grace and *laver of redemption and of life*. Already the offertory prayers of Mass express precisely the Church's faith:

Accept, O Holy Father, Almighty and eternal God, this spotless host, which I, your unworthy servant, offer to You, my living and true God, to atone for my numberless sins, offenses and negligences; on behalf of all here present and likewise for all faithful Christians living and dead, that it may profit me and them as a means of salvation to life everlasting.

Amen.

We offer You, O Lord, the chalice of salvation, humbly begging of Your mercy that it may arise before Your divine Majesty, with a pleasing fragrance, for our salvation and for that of the whole world. Amen.

And the offertory verse which is part of the propers of the requiem masses prays:

O Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory, deliver the souls of all the faithful departed from the pains of hell and from the bottomless pit: deliver them from the lion's mouth, that hell swallow them not up, that they fall not into darkness, but let the standard-bearer holy Michael lead them into that holy light; which Thou didst promise of old to Abraham and to his seed. We offer to Thee, O Lord, sacrifices and prayers: do Thou receive them in behalf of those souls of whom we make memorial this day. Grant them, O Lord, to pass from death to that life, which thou didst promise of old to Abraham and to his seed.

Cardinal-Archbishop Griffin's request allows us today to remember and to commemorate the souls of the victims of two World Wars in the most effective way possible: Not only by a moment of silence, not only by our personal prayers and in our human emotions of grief, but by applying the infinitely rich fruits of forgiveness, divine charity and grace for the salvation of so many unknown souls. No attempt should be spared, no occasion missed to save souls from purgatory and to pray for them in union with Jesus Christ on the Cross – even if those souls have not been known to us in this world and lived over a century ago.

Today we should also remember the many priests who lost their lives together with the soldiers to whom they administered the sacraments on the battlefields of WW I and also in the continuation of that terrible war during WWII. In his first Encyclical Pope Pius XI had stated already *that the ranks of the clergy in almost every country have been decimated, ... because so many priests have died on the battlefield in the exercise of their sacred ministry.*

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