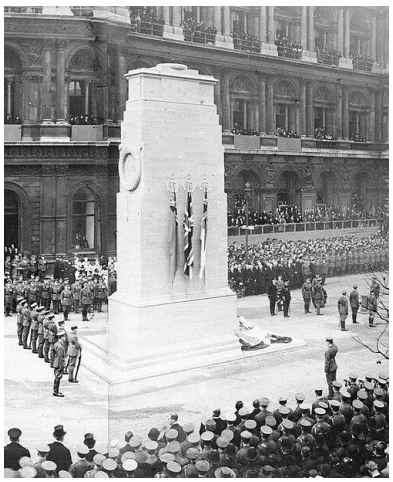
Making Sense of Remembrance

Almighty Father, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of all: govern the hearts and minds of those in authority, and bring the families of the nations, divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin, to be subject to his just and gentle rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

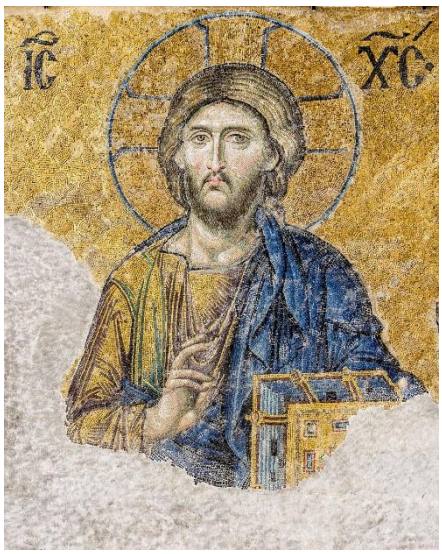
This weekend we make our annual Remembrance Observances, as we have done since the end of the First World War – although we hear less often the refrain, *'Never Again'*, than we did when we were younger. Something has changed in the nature of our shared Remembrance, perhaps as we have lost the sense that war is something occasional and rare, but is simply part of the background noise of a conflicted and violent world. And that, in turn, has consequences for those of us who are people of *faith*, because it represents a fundamental shift from the vision of the Gospel that 'peace' is something meaningful for us to aim for, and that it is as 'peacemakers' that we have our *basic identity* as the friends of Christ (cf Matthew 5.9, part of the gospel for All Saints Day on 1st November).



As for the formal Remembrance Observances – the collective silence and commemorations – it is easy to see how they grew out of the enormous trauma of the 'Great War' and were an apt way to channel some of the shock and the grief of the experience of those years 1914-18. But our own trauma – if it is indeed that in the first place – is different. It is the knowledge that war has *not* been averted, that the original intention of the Remembrance Commemorations has not been fulfilled. In some ways it is the *opposite* which has established itself as the global norm, a *complacency* about war, and a sense that there is *nothing that we can do about it*. For those of us who are explicitly Christian, it makes the reclamation of our identity as people of peace, as peacemakers, as *reconcilers*, the more urgent. In that sense, our role in the world is to be more like diplomats – *bridge-builders* – or *bearers of aid and assistance* (the 'emergency services') than as *soldiers* or *combatants*. That is what the

fundamental moral focus of the gospels seems to require of us, even as we *take a stand* against violence and abuse against the vulnerable and weak.

So we note that, in church, our remembrances take place in the wake of our commemoration of the saints and all souls; that they do so as the Church Year is about to come to its completion in the Festival of *Christ the King* – the one before whom all human armies will be subject, and by whom all human conflict and violence will be turned upside down:



The Lord said to my lord,
'Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies your footstool.'

The Lord sends out from Zion
your mighty sceptre.
Rule in the midst of your foes.
Your people will offer themselves willingly
on the day you lead your forces
on the holy mountains.
From the womb of the morning,
like dew, your youth will come to you.
The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind;
'You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.'

Psalm 110.1-4

This vision of the Glorious Christ gathering all things (and all peoples) together before the Face of God, and casting away all violence (and trauma) and fear – a process of the *reconciliation* of all things in God – is the basis for our own faith, and the light within which we determine our own thoughts and actions, that they conform to the pattern of Christ (cf Romans 8.29; 2 Corinthians 5.18-19). The New Testament presupposes that we do intend to conform to the model of Jesus Christ, and that this is our fundamental motivation and intention – not that we shall jump into conflict willy-nilly and simply assume that God will pick up the pieces. But it did not stop the earliest Christians worrying about the destiny of those who had died before Jesus Christ has indeed 'made all things new' (cf Revelation 21,5). To this, the Apostle writes that it is the *whole meaning* of the coming among us of Jesus Christ that all things, including all people (including those who have died before us) should be gathered back into God's embrace. The only exception will be for those who *actively resist it*:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18

So it is of great significance that this is the reading chosen for the Sunday when we make our Remembrance observances, and in the light of all the questions which arise whenever we face the inconsistency between a world which is fixated on conflict and war, and a vision of faith in which we are orientated towards the calling of God into peace.

No doubt there are those, in this world, and among those who have gone before us, for whom the worldly conflicts themselves are justification and glory. No doubt there are those who have no interest in God, and who repudiate faith altogether. Let us *lament* this; let us continue to *pray for them*, that even at this late stage their hearts might yet be converted. But as for those who are casualties of a world which has become complacent about violence and destruction, we are guided by the vision of faith which opens up at *All Saints* with the recognition that those who are gathered before the Face of God are the ones who have endured through the times of trial (Revelation 7.14); it is a vision of faith which is confirmed at Christ the King, where Jesus Christ completes the work of reconciliation: and our commemorations of those who have *died* – both at All Souls and at our annual Remembrance Observances – make sense precisely because they are held between these outer perimeters of hope and of light. But it is before the Face of Christ and among the Communion of Saints that we shall make sense of it all, not from the place of conflict itself – the broken and corrupted world. As we place our commemorations and observances properly in the light of each other, may we see our faith itself become the more radiant and hopeful and glorious, guided and inspired by the vision of Christ as its basis and its goal.