



## The Parish of Saints Anthony & Aloysius

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### Homily at Mass 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B – 11 November 2018

A minute's silence at 11 o'clock on Remembrance Day is an Australian idea – first promoted by Melbourne born Edward Honey in an article in the *London Evening News* in May 1919. After 4 years of terrible war, conducted on an industrial scale, that tore up vast of Europe, involving 71m soldiers, 16m killed including 60,000 Australians, bringing down royal houses and ushering in the scourge of communism, the first popular reaction was euphoria, singing and dancing on the streets, joy unplugged: But then the grim reality began to sink in as war memorials began to appear in towns and cities here in Australia and around the world, and as soldiers and nurses returned from the War front. People saw the physical injuries as well as the deep psychological trauma, and it began to hit home that countless others would never return – these are the graves that seem to stretch for miles across the French and Belgian country side in places like Villers Bretonneux and Fromelles and Anzac Cove in Turkey. When the guns of war fell silent at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month 1918, the shocked reaction of so many across the world is the silence we continue to keep today, 100 years since the end of the Great War as some called it; the War to end all war, many hoped.

Pope John Paul II often referred to the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the “bloody century”. Human blood swept like a mighty tide across the world when we look back on it: World War I, World War II, wars between nations and peoples; wars of independence; race wars, Korea; Vietnam. These wars brought about social dislocation: modern multicultural Australia is what it is today because of so many who either chose immigration or had it forced on them – Italians, Poles, Greeks and others who came to Australia immediately after World War II; Vietnamese boat people after 1975 when the war in Vietnam ended; and the ongoing movement of peoples from North Africa making their way to Europe, and the “caravan” of South American refugees marching towards USA. The wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as the space programme, have given us many everyday things like the microwave oven, computers, drones, fast air travel, gadgets and gizmos and much much more. Militarily, it's given us the powerful and destructive weaponry that threatens the world's continued existence. And the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have also given us the terrible social phenomenon that has blighted Western society: the terrible reality of fatherlessness – fathers who are absent either because they never returned home from War, or their experience was such that they could never relate to their wives or their children.

Societies like ours responded to the tragedy of World War I in many ways. Australian journalist and historian Charles Bean returned to Gallipoli and France after the war to collect all sorts of things that became the nucleus of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. The

Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance was dedicated in 1934 and is now the major venue for our State ANZAC Day march and service, Remembrance Day, and other commemorations throughout the year. The RSL and Legacy were established to support returned servicemen and women and widows, orphans and children. You and I play our part – remembering with gratitude, and for us and many others prayer – as we wear a poppy.

Poppies are a fairly hardy plant – they quickly appeared in the fields of Europe churned up under the heavy thud of soldiers boots, scarred by bombs and mines and barbed wire, deep trenches and the dead. It was as if the blood of countless thousands had so penetrated the soil that it had coloured the petals of these small flowers. Soon after the end of the War, wearing a poppy in our lapel became a popular way to remember the war dead. Organisations like the RSL and the YMCA began to sell poppies as a way of supporting veterans, war widows and their families. This continues today. Canadian military Dr John McCrae who saw a young friend killed by a German bomb and later buried him, wrote this poem:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.