

St Peter's, Ealing  
Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2015  
Remembrance Sunday

They shall grow not old.

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### **For the Fallen by Robert Laurence Binyon**

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,  
England mourns for her dead across the sea.  
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,  
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill: Death august and royal  
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.  
There is music in the midst of desolation  
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,  
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.  
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,  
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;  
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;  
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;  
They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,  
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,  
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known  
As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,  
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,  
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,  
To the end, to the end, they remain.

World War 1 began with a welter of patriotic banter and joie de vivre. Off to fight the bosh and home by Christmas! Then the news came, the first British casualties at the Battle of Mons on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1914, then the battle of Le Cateau on the 26<sup>th</sup> which ended with the holding of the Imperial German Army at the First Battle of the Marne, 5<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> September. A month in and the story began to change.

Robert Laurence Binyon wrote his poem, published in the Times on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 1914, whilst sat on the cliffs of North Cornwall having heard the news of these casualties of war. Romantic yet poignant, gallant yet tinged with grief, these words attempted to hold a level of heroism which perhaps a year or two later would have changed as the reality of the mud and the blood came home. At this point of his writing Binyon, like most people patriotic to their King and country, is already trying to find an answer to or a place for the grim reality of full-on industrial warfare. Soon, unable to enlist because of his age Binyon would take on the role of a Red Cross worker and he, as with many others, would see much death, both in his role and amongst his friends and family.

No one was prepared for what was to happen. It was all going to be over by Christmas, and then Easter, then the summer. The men who were surviving began by feeling the war wasn't real, by the end of war Civvy Street was the world of aliens. The world would change. The stability suggested in verse four is one of eternity, that eternity born of death. The death Binyon writes of is the heroic death of a warfare no longer fought. Everyone will soon realise how different it was to be, as war memorials were unveiled in every town, village and parish hall across the land.

Today war has changed again. We call the assailants terrorists, they blow up planes and lay land mines. No longer a clear battle line, nor are agent provocateurs defined by nationhood or state but culture or religion or political ideology. What we have not learnt is how to live in peace.

Our passage today from the letter to the Hebrews speaks of a new reality in our relationship with God brought about by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For centuries the sacrifices offered in the Temple tried with all good will to bring reconciliation with God. Yet its imperfection is echoed in the repetition of that sacrificial offering. The coming of Christ and the offering of himself once for all upon the cross not only brought an end to the need for the repetitious sacrificial offering and sprinkling of blood in the Holy of Holies, it prepared the

way to a new relationship with God the Father. This relationship or new status of the existence with God is emphasised by the realisation that in Jesus we now have a new advocate at God's right hand. In the cross of Christ we find a new understanding of God's relationship with his people.

Christ is found amongst the suffering. The cross of Christ was in the mud of Flanders, the confusion of Dunkirk. Jesus walks with the Syrian refugee and the Libyan mother running for the life her child. Jesus told us that when we care for the prisoner, the hungry and the homeless we cared for him.

Remembrance is part of this care we take. To remember, to hold before us the darker side of human existence, one perhaps that comes into a starker reality with war and the effects of war, the misery and destitution war brings. In remembering, in that human suffering we bring upon each other in conflict, we invoke the Christ who came to bring peace and healing. That Christ that we celebrate here in the bread and wine of the Eucharist; bread broken, wine outpoured; flesh torn, blood spilt.

Remembering, this Remembrance Sunday, is to honour those whose lives have been taken by inhumanity; to acknowledge our debt to those who fought for our freedom, who gave their lives for our safety and the establishment of peace. Remembering is our responsibility to uphold the words of Jesus, to hear his call for us and to play our part proclaiming God's healing love and wholeness to the world, to bring peace and in bringing, honouring those who have fallen, wherever that might be.