

Homily for November 8<sup>th</sup> 2020  
32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time

### **The Wisdom of Remembering**

J.R.R. Tolkien was born in 1892 and died in 1973. At the start of WWI he would have been 22. When war was declared on Germany in September, 1939 he was 47 years old. He was a man who witnessed first-hand the battle field and trenches of 1914 to 18. He was an Oxford Scholar who would have seen many young men go to war, and not return – who had been Oxford Students in the late 30s and 40s.

The Lord of the Rings introduced 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century readers and film lovers to the imaginative world that so vividly captured the epic struggle between good and evil. A book centering on two unassuming hobbits, Frodo and Sam Wise Gamgee, who in order to stop the advance of Mordor and the machinations of Sauron to control and dominate Middle Earth, have to take that one ring and destroy it in the fires of Mount Doom.

The inscription on the ring read:

***One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,  
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them***

Although this book was not an allegory, we are drawn to think of the parallels between the Ring and Hitler's Third Reich. A Reich that envisioned a 1000 year reign of an evil ideology that like Sauron's intention for Middle Earth, would have bound the world in an evil dragnet. Imagine if Hitler had been victorious. What would the world be like for us today?

And to think that Canada, a country with a population of less than 12 Million in 1944 played a decisive role. On D-Day, Tuesday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division landed on Juno Beach. The assault on Normandy, along a 100 km stretch of French coastline across the English Channel from Great Britain, was the largest seaborne invasion in history. More than 14,000 Canadian soldiers landed or parachuted into France on D-Day. The Royal Canadian Navy contributed 110 warships and 10,000 sailors and the RCAF contributed 15 fighter and fighter-bomber squadrons to the assault. There were 1,074 Canadian casualties, including 359 killed.

The Canadian assault troops stormed ashore in the face of fierce opposition from German strongholds and mined beach obstacles. The soldiers raced across the wide-open beaches swept with machine gun fire, and stormed the gun positions. In fierce hand-to-hand fighting, they fought their way inland securing a critical bridgehead for the allied invasion. D Day was a turning point in World War II and led to the liberation of Europe and the defeat of Nazi Germany.

Sir John Keegan died in 2012. He was awarded the Order of the British Empire, was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and an eminent British historian. He wrote a book entitled: *The Six Armies in Normandy*. In it he stated the following concerning the Canadian 3rd Division on D-Day:

***“At the end of the day, its forward elements stood deeper into France than those of any other division. The opposition the Canadians faced was stronger than that of any other beach save Omaha. That was an accomplishment in which the whole nation could take considerable pride.”<sup>1</sup>***

Tolkien’s concentration on unassuming Hobbits, whose courage and will to accomplish their task, against seemingly insurmountable odds, is I think, a tribute and testimony to the anonymous soldiers who took Juno Beach on June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944. It is also a tribute to all of the soldiers and civilians who, not only on Juno Beach, but in countless other battles and entrenched in evil regimes – like Soviet and Chinese Communism – resisted the forces of evil, to the point of their own deaths. A number surpassing 123 million in the 20<sup>th</sup> century died as a consequence of war, genocide and megalomaniac leaders.

It is important therefore that we always remember on a day like this those who were subjected to such horrific violence as we praise, pray for and give thanks to God for their valour and premature deaths as a result of such evil.

On such a day we are to take to heart Jesus’ parable of the Wise and Unwise virgins by prudently discerning how to live each day of our lives as people who uphold the intrinsic dignity and value of every human being for it was for this reason that so many died so young and they cannot be forgotten.

In the Parable, the bridegroom is of course a representation of Jesus Christ and we are the virgins who are to watch by how we are living each and every day. Although COVID 19 is not of the magnitude of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, it is a threat that requires dogged determinism and a united effort to bend the curve downward as we look forward to the day when this microbial enemy is defeated. COVID19 has robbed from people lives, and livelihood, has curtailed grandparents from seeing their grandchildren, isolated us from each other, and caused economic upheaval. It is shaking us in a way that while different from the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it is our generational crisis, I pray that on this day we will be inspired by those whose courage and sacrifice we are remembering today.

Notice in the parable that only five of the ten virgins have adequate oil. Remember the oil is to be used to keep the lamps burning. Back in Mathew 5 Jesus says that we are to let our light shine before people and so give glory to our Father in Heaven. The light represents the works we will do to make our country better place to live. The oil are therefore our good works that allow the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.junobeach.info/>

light to shine. Such works require that the wisdom referred to in our first reading is expressed in how we want to live.

*Wisdom is radiant and unfading,  
and she is easily discerned by those who love her,  
and is found by those who seek her. To fix one's thoughts on her is perfect understanding  
and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care.*

It is this kind of wisdom that we want to apply when facing a war that is very different from the one the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry faced in June 1944. It is because we understand that wisdom “hastens to make herself known to those who desire her”, that we want to respond to COVID19 with prudence and care. It is as we do all we can to seek the Lord and live centred in him that we can have an interior peace in the midst of this COVID war that our text describes as “free from care”

The Hobbits on their tortuous trek to destroy the Ring faced real challenges but Sam and Frodo stayed united and were aware of a power greater than their own that so guided them so as to defeat ring of power. The Canadian soldiers stayed united with the allies to defeat the power of Nazi aggression and domination

On this Remembrance Day weekend this can inspire us to face our present threat with courage, wisdom and solidarity to daily rise to the challenge posed by COVID19 and light our lamps, guided by the wisdom of God in the present as we look forward to that day when the bride groom Jesus will come and we will go out to meet him.