

Homily for July 4th 2021

14th Sunday Ordinary *Time*.

Yad Vashem

In Jerusalem is the Holocaust Museum, *Yad Vashem*. *Yad Vashem* is Hebrew for *a place and a name* (a memorial). It is taken from Isaiah 56:5:

I will give in my house and within my wall a monument and a name... I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off.

In this verse it is the Lord who is speaking at a time when the Jewish people were in Exile, cut off from their land, among a foreign people where their name was in danger of being lost and forgotten. He promises that this will not happen, and they will be remembered and one day restored to their land. How appropriate therefore that in response to the Shoah this verse from Isaiah captures what *Yad Vashem* is meant to be. At *Yad Vashem* there are many pavilions and a thorough museum, but the heart of the memorial is the Hall of Names — countless volumes in which the names the dead are recorded.

To die without a place or a name is to lack something proper to the human being — not just the human body, but the human soul. That is why we remember our war dead, their bodies lost on battlefields far away, never to be recovered, by recording their names — on cenotaphs, memorial places, books of honour. The heart of our Parliament buildings in Ottawa is the memorial chapel of the Peace Tower, where each day a page is turned in the great book of remembrance where the names of the fallen are recorded.

To honour the names of those who have died is to remember them. That is why for us as Catholic Christians, funeral rites and burial are so important. To remember is for us an anticipation of the Resurrection of the dead, where God will literally re-member us.

It is in part because we know the importance of remembering that the discovery of the unmarked graves at schools run by the Catholic Church had led to such a visceral reaction. Although the actions of some who vandalized churches show the dark side of this story, I think there is something very positive in it as well. It is the recognition of the dignity of these children and the importance of remembering them.

In the readings from the Gospel and Ezekiel, there is a theme that is so appropriate for today. Ezekiel was writing from Babylon, where he was one of the Exiles.

Listen again to these words:

Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. ⁴The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, “Thus says the

Lord GOD.”⁵ Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them¹

Notice Ezekiel is addressed as “mortal”. This means he shares in the suffering of his people, he does not stand above them or separated from them, but he is one of them. He is called by the Lord to have the people understand why they now found themselves in Exile so they could learn from this, be reconciled, and eventually be established in the Land of Israel – the promise expressed in the reading from Isaiah I quoted at the beginning.

But notice as well, the Lord cautions Ezekiel that the people will not want to listen and learn. We see the same thing at play in today’s Gospel where Jesus goes home to Nazareth and the locals take offense at him.

I want to suggest that the Lord is inviting us in these difficult days to not run from the pain of the unmarked graves but see this as an invitation to work towards an honouring of the names of the children and to bring about a deeper healing in our country. A healing enabled by honestly remembering our past so we can further the work of reconciliation between First Nations and those whose ancestry originated on other continents.

A time like this allows us to discover with St. Paul, that in our weakness we can discover the strength of Jesus. For the one whose death, burial and resurrection is remembered whenever we gather for Mass calls us to remember those who died in Catholic Residential Schools and were buried in unmarked graves.

On June 1st Fr Raymond de’Souza wrote an article in response to the discovery of the Kamloops graves. He concluded his National Post entry with these words:

To bury without recording or remembrance is another matter altogether. We speak of the “disposal” of remains — burial in the earth, burial at sea, cremation — but it ought never be a mere disposal, the final casting aside of a throwaway culture.

Efforts will now be made, through the local coroner’s office and local Indigenous leaders, to ensure identification where possible and a fitting burial, either on the grounds of the school or on the children’s home territories. That is a painstaking and painful task but, even after many years have passed, fitting and necessary.²

Yad Vashem represents a place of remembering in response to the horrors of the Shoah. Such an example a motivation for us to further remember this part of our dark history so that we can cooperate with the Lord who says to each child whose mortal remains are in an unmarked grave:

I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off,

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Eze 2:3–5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

² <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/raymond-j-de-souza-what-happened-at-the-kamloops-residential-school-was-an-offence-against-humanity>