

Homily for Remembrance Day  
November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020

“Churchill the Optimist”

Imagine you were born in 1874. At the outbreak of WW1 you are 40; followed by the Spanish Flu of 1918-20, that infected a 3rd of the world's population and killing an estimated 50 million. Then as the 1930s dawn you are 56 and a world-wide depression affects economies in many countries. On May 10<sup>th</sup> 1940, War having been declared on Germany the previous September, you are seated in the British House of Commons, age 65. A vote of non-confidence has unseated the government of Neville Chamberlain. You are called to the residence of the King George VI who asks you to form the Government. Who are you?

Thanks be to God, you are Winston Churchill. Termed the greatest Briton of all time, if ever in history there was a convergence of Providence with a critical moment in history it was Sir Winston Churchill and World War II. Soon after he assumed office, France falls to the Nazi's thereby securing for the Luftwaffe (German Airforce) airfields that make access to Britain easy for the German Bombers.

The Blitz against the United Kingdom in 1940 and 1941 was a term first used by the British press and is the German word for 'lightning.' The world had never witnessed anything like it previously. Relentless bombing of London, and then cities like Coventry, Plymouth, and Southampton led Hitler to believe the war would be short-lived and Churchill would capitulate. So confident was Hitler of the success of the Blitz, that would prepare for a land invasion, that in the late summer of 1940 a parade route through the streets of Berlin was mapped out for the victory celebrations.

What Hitler had not fully considered was the tenacity of the British Prime minister nor the courage and determinism of the British people. Just think how the odds were stacked against Great Britain in 1940-41. They were alone, in contesting the Nazi barrage – the US wouldn't enter the war until December 1941 after Pearl Harbour. Not only were they having to defend the homeland but also fight critical battles in places like Iraq, to secure the oil fields from German control. Churchill thought if Iraq was lost so would the war.

This photograph (see photo below) is one of the most famous war pictures. It captures the aftermath of the bombing of October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1940. This is the remains of Holland House a historic 17th. Century London house. An oil bomb started a fire on one of the towers and a 'Molotoff breadbasket' and a shower of incendiaries fell on the building. Firemen saved the east wing from complete destruction, but the rest of the house was a shell- The famous library containing a number of valuable and historical books was completely wrecked. It is believed that the three men shown inspecting books in the library was likely staged to let the Germans know, we will not be defeated.

I have shared this brief story of Winston Churchill on this Remembrance Day because he lived out this thoughtful and challenging quote. He said:

*A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.*

His was a life filled with difficulty and while temperamentally could be unpredictable in his moods, he understood that his response and leadership were critical, most especially in that first year of the War.

While War is something that we are never to glamorize or desire, there are times when sadly, it is necessary. Imagine if Churchill had surrendered to Hitler.

Today we remember those who fought in war, who suffered through war and we also remember all of those who since World War II have served in the Canadian Military helping to secure the world from the horrors of a nuclear war.

As St. Paul says in today's reading from Philippians, we

**long for the peace that passes understanding. To experience this peace, he gives us two practical pieces of advice on our interior lives:**

- 1) ask for what you need (supplication) but also remember what you have already been given and so make your supplications *with thanksgiving*, we can do this because God is our Father, all good and worthy of all our love.**
- 2) remember today whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing and whatever is commendable, is there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. **So when we find ourselves preoccupied by bad news and anxiety, tell your loving Father of your need to guard your interior life.****

On this Remembrance Day we thank God and think about the man born on November 30<sup>th</sup> 1874 and died on January 24<sup>th</sup> 1965.

May we face the challenges of our time of COVID19 inspired by how Churchill faced the challenges of a lifetime remembering this:

*A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.*

