

# ***The Battle***

## ***Sixth Sunday of Easter (A)***

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# **Sunday, May 14, 2023**

We can not begin to understand the horrors of War, nor can we imagine what it is that the soldiers involved went through. At Anzac Day, we can speak of the ideals that flow – peace, courage, freedom with little understanding of what was the cost of these things – a cost so great that many of those who paid this price refused to speak of it on their return. However, we view this in terms of heroism or sacrifice, we really do not know what it is all about. And as the Anzac heroes have now passed on, we can continue in the illusion of the nobility of War and conveniently overlook the privation that it gave. This does not prevent us from remembering them with gratitude, but we must take care that we do not assume that we know what it is about. One of the things about my growing up at the age I am is that in my days of Uni, there were also the homeless, but these weren't the youth running away from parents who said: No, but they were old men whose best friend was a bottle in a brown paper bag. And whose story, if you ask them, was not the down and out no-hoper, but of a promising career, suspended for the war and not able to be taken up because of the horrors they had seen or experienced. These are the heroes of war and the casualties of war. The ghostly figures of the Prisoners of War or the inmates of Auschwitz this is the evil that is war and although there is the triumph and its repercussions of peace and freedom. This is what we must never forget, never 'spin' over. Anzac Cove, the Somme, Kokoda must never be sanitized from the reality of the horror of evil in the face of war.

Our Gospel this morning is from the upper room discourses of Jesus on the night before the Cross and it is to a group of disciples who do not seem to grasp what it is he is saying – I am going he says (but he is still here). Another comforter he says – but what does it mean – for we look from our vantage point of history and see them as thick or slow, but how could they understand the next twenty four hours. For from where they stood, they could not see the cross and afterwards, how could they really understand. For the cross was not an instrument of execution – it was an instrument of torture – designed to prolong life and suffering, not like the guillotine as an efficient killing apparatus. And we can sanitise this as well. We can forget the horror of the cross and focus only on the benefits but it is the evil of war, the evil of humanity is the battle that we face and in this cosmic battle of good vs evil, our hope is the promised comforter who will not abandon us. For this is the most haunting cry from the cross – My God, My God, why have you forsaken me. For although we now know of the cross, let us not lose sight of its purpose and the purpose of it all – in the war, to stand against the evil in the world. And we cannot achieve this without the power of the spirit that is promised.

As individuals or as a church, we can be tempted to think in purely human ways. The right programme and activity will solve the problem, and all we need to do is find it. What a wonderful world this would be if that is all required. Merely to find a catalogue programme, a good fundraising idea, or the best arrangement of seats. But we are called to the war, and when we get involved, the things we see, like the experience of the veterans, may be challenging to talk about. We have seen some of them now, and even though we know that evil will not overcome us, we must face it.

The hardest part of my job is not the long hours or the constant demands but the burden of understanding that when we start to do what we are called to, many will suffer as the devil fights back. Not that we are by any means defeated, but there is the cost of the victory. For Jesus, it was the cross, but for each of us, there will be burdens that will seek to nullify our effectiveness. For the comforter can only come after the abandonment. And we can only achieve our calling through participation in the journey of faith, and we must always look beyond the present to the future promise.

Perhaps I am not clear – that the things I am saying make no sense, yet this is what Jesus found with the disciples. Only in making that journey will we find its endpoint, and only when we look back we genuinely understand how the circumstances have shaped us and prepared us for the next battle, the next stage of the journey. From today's word, let us look for the coming of the Spirit and prepare ourselves, not for some 'party' or commemoration, but for the battles still to come. It is for this reason that we are called, and for this reason that the promise is given.

Let us not fear the battle, but with confidence prepare for the future that stands before us. Confidence in the promise of the advocate, the spirit. As someone once said: "If we do not bother the devil, the devil will not bother us." Therefore let us be prepared.

**AMEN**