

Our Gospel reading today tells of the promise of peace Jesus makes to his disciples, a peace that will quell the fear in their troubled hearts. In the world of the 21st century, where 56 conflicts are now raging across the globe with 92 countries now involved in fighting beyond their borders, peace can seem like an impossible dream.

Some of you here this morning can just remember the Second World War. It may come as no surprise to you that we are now at the point of the greatest level of conflict since that appalling time in our world's history. Given that the First World War was supposed to be the war to end all wars, and in the aftermath of the Second World War, the nations came together to write a body of International Law that would protect human rights, protect civilians caught in armed conflict, and ensure that genocide could not happen again, we are probably all left wondering what went wrong?

In beginning to grapple with that question, I want to tell you a story from my own family's history.

In 1985, when the Iron Curtain was still firmly drawn across Europe, I visited Auschwitz. Back then very few people from Western Europe were able to get into Poland. On my return I went to see my grandparents, and my grandad said he wanted to talk to me alone. As we sat on the end of my grandparents bed, he began to cry as he told me about being part of the division of the British Army that had liberated the Belsen concentration camp. Until that day, he'd never told anyone about what he'd seen. We talked for a long time, and after that conversation something in me had changed. Yes, I'd visited a

concentration camp, and it had affected me deeply, but listening to the memories of my own grandfather, watching the pain and trauma of Europe's Jews reflected in his tears brought the reality of 1945 into 1985.

The Hebrew scriptures place a great deal of emphasis on remembering. The highest festival of the Jewish year is all about recalling the Passover and the word used for remember in our first reading from Exodus is *zakar*. But the word means so much more than just remembering. Like many Hebrew words, there is a depth of meaning that gets lost in the translation into English. It's not just about remembering. The word carries a sense of bringing the past into the present. Doing so has a physicality, a kinesthesia about it. What we do helps us to remember. In breaking bread and sharing the wine of the Eucharist we practice *zakar*. Bringing the sacrifice of Jesus into the here and now, just as for the Jewish people eating unleavened bread brings the liberation from Egypt into their present.

From our own tradition the words "do this in remembrance of me" illustrate beautifully the notion of *zakar*. Remembrance in the way indicated by *zakar* isn't passive. It's active and intentional. It's something we choose to do and the importance of how we do it cannot be over emphasized.

In bringing the past into the present we must take care. Provost Howard set the tone in 1940 of how that awful night in November should be brought to mind in the future. In a context where the people of Coventry were traumatized and angry he gently spoke of eschewing revenge, building a more Christ-child like world, of recognizing that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and that in standing in the ruins, the people of Coventry were standing with Christ at the crucifixion. In standing with Jesus, the victim of appalling

violence, we also stand with him in the resurrection, the total antithesis of destruction and death.

This is where my grandfather's story and Coventry's collide. Although my family is from Manchester, Coventry played a significant role in our family narrative. My grandparents collected all of what we'd now call merch from the consecration – I still have some of it. They visited and queued for hours to get in and ensured that my brother and I visited as children.

Despite all he'd seen and experienced my grandad held no hatred and I think Coventry's story played its part in that. How we remember matters and when we remember with revenge, hatred, and possibly even xenophobia in our hearts, we do the notion of zakar a disservice. Not only does God command the Hebrews to remember through a shared meal, God also called on them to treat others kindly because they were once slaves in Egypt. Such remembering changes our hearts and minds.

In a world where so much of the post war consensus has been torn down, we must remember that in bringing the pain from the past into the present we must trust, like Provost Howard did, in the power of sins forgiven, resurrection and the power of both to change the world. This is no passive action but requires courage, forbearance and a willingness to see the world through others' eyes. In the midst of our war torn world it's a challenge to us all.