

Christian Perspectives: proclaiming the message from one generation to another

This afternoon we will attend the Remembrance Day assembly at our grandchildren's Cape Breton school. Their Grade 1 and 2 classes will lead the singing of O Canada. The children are affected by the solemnity of the Remembrance Day rituals. They absorb some of the deep sadness that is present in the trumpet calls to silence, the laying of wreaths, the somber marching and flag bearing. When I was a child, this sadness was a direct inheritance from parents and grandparents who had experienced the First and Second World Wars. We think now about our new veterans returned from Afghanistan and about the next wave of soldiers being sent to Iraq. An additional perspective is offered by refugees who have fled war-torn parts of the world. These new Canadians' stories as well become part of the fabric of our Remembrance Day Rituals to be passed on to the next generations.

Memories of events that have shaped who we are and how we aspire to live need to be shared from one generation to the next. The stories that support our deepest values need to be told often. Our children and grandchildren need to know what we believe and how we have come to those convictions.

We human beings have always celebrated our heroes: the strong, brave ones who stand guard, keep us safe, hold the enemy at bay, step up to meet hostility and accept injuries when there is conflict. It is right to say thank-you to those who sacrifice for the sake of others, whose vocation is to protect.

It is also time to elevate a different kind of hero: we must celebrate and learn from our peace makers. Last weekend we met a couple just returned from a tour of South Africa. They met a country committed to the long process of building up those who have been oppressed in order to create every sort of equality and opportunity. Nelson Mandela is revered by all because he led the way. His methods and attitudes are worth studying. Forgiveness was the central theme of everything he taught and did. They also met an elderly granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi at a celebration of his birthday. Gandhi's birthday on October 2 is the day now commemorated by the United Nations as the International Day of Non-Violence.

We Canadians need role models like these to show us the way to healing relationships with our first nations neighbours. We need them to teach us how to be peacemakers in a world where so many still mistakenly believe that conflict can be successfully resolved by overpowering one another. We need to learn the ways of The Stephen Lewis Foundation, Doctors Without Borders and Engineers Without Borders, the Canadian Food Grains Bank, our national churches that form working relationships with people in need so that effective, practical help can be given.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit (those who know they need God), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn (are mindful of loss), for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek (humble), for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (want to learn and practice right ways), for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful (those who practice compassion, kindness), for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart (authentic, honest), for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers (who practice non violent means for resolving conflict), for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:3-9)

To be "blessed" means to be happy and fortunate. Jesus was teaching about the inner qualities that make people happy and fortunate. They are the same qualities that can transform and bless our families, our communities and our world.