

4 August 1914. 4 August 2014. Lights out at 10.00pm for one hour. Did you? Will you? What do you want to remember in this Centenary of The Great War? Somehow, we are all connected by this, and the remembering. For each of us will have stories in our family which, in some way or other, tell of this time. Yet how often have we heard it said that those who came back remained silent? Perhaps the horror was just too searing to relate.

My grandfather was a chaplain in The Great War. He died when I was 5. So I never knew him. The family said that he did not speak either. What I have of his is a pyx. A pyx is a vessel for carrying the blessed sacrament of Holy Communion to people in homes, or to places away from the church building - places where they meet to remember the crucified and risen Christ present in their midst.

It is not the pyx I usually use in my parish to take communion to homes. It is a little small to hold the size of wafers we use. But this year I am going to use it, and as I do so I shall remember these things:

I shall remember Padre Bernard Nicolas Nathaniel Woodard and his ministry to the soldiers of the trenches. I shall try to imagine him in camp chapel, with the gathered congregation praying in earshot of the guns, the cries of the wounded and dying, the commands of officers. I shall try to imagine the congregation of officers and men, of nurses and orderlies. I shall think of how he might have carried this pyx, with its sacred contents, on truck, horse, or foot to the other congregation in the mud and filth and fear and love of the trenches. I shall, of course, come nowhere near imagining how it really was. But this pyx and its sacred contents connect me to him and to the action I do, which he did too, in saying the words: 'Take this in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.'

I am writing this to you from a room in St George's House, Windsor Castle. Out of my window I can see the keep of the castle, with the Royal Standard flying, a sign that Her Majesty the Queen is in residence. This morning a group of us, here on a consultation about how we talk about God today, met for prayer in the beautiful 15th Century Chapel of St George's. We prayed in the stalls under the flags and helms of the members of the Honourable Order of the Garter. We shared the Communion in a chapel remembering the family of Edward IV.

Surrounded by the pomp of knights and royalty you might think that we are minded to forget, in the beauty of the words, the soaring fan vaulting, the airy tracery of the windows, a world in need of salvation. This has not been so for me. Why? Because we attend to the scriptures and break bread remembering Jesus Christ, the dead and risen one, day after day.

We returned to our conversation in our study group. '42000 killed in one day. It's almost incredible.' That was the reading from Judges 12. 'And yet, twenty years ago, didn't we hear of 900,000 in Rwanda, killed in what was it? A few weeks?' 'Have you heard Father Timothy Radcliffe talk about it? He was Provincial Minister of the Dominican community in Rwanda at the time. He was told to stay in Kigali, but of course he couldn't. He travelled through the bloody fields and villages of death and came to his own community now decimated by the killing. What could he say? Nothing, except to say the Eucharist'. Father Timothy Radcliffe writes: 'we re-enacted what Jesus did on the night before he died. We repeated his words 'This is my body given for you.'" He concludes, 'When we utter words of anguish, the we remember that on the cross Jesus made them his own. And when we can find no words, not even to scream, then we may take his.'

Perhaps, in the silence he kept, Bernard Woodard was remembering each time the actions and the words of Jesus Christ: 'Do this in remembrance of me', and 'love one another as I have loved you'.

Maybe, in our remembering this year, we may be filled with a new resolve, today, to know that he never forgets us and that he still calls us to walk in his Way. In this way too, perhaps, shall the sacrifice of the fallen bear fruit.

Martin Stephenson