

This time of Remembrance can raise different emotions in different people. For some they may be remembering friends or family members who went off to war, never to return, perhaps 80 years ago, perhaps more recently; or it may be a time when they acknowledge the ultimate sacrifice of someone they were serving alongside in a conflict in recent years. For others it can raise in them a sense of gratitude that many people are prepared to lay their lives on the line today for their country – whether that be trying to maintain a hoped-for peace in some country or maybe to police the waters surrounding this island on which we live - knowing that in future years it is possible that on a day such as today, we may be remembering them also.

However, we relate to this day, there is one word that gives us the reason for the very existence of, the very need for, our armed forces, and that word is conflict. We live in a world where conflict seems rife. There appears to be conflict between countries; conflict within countries; conflict within communities – it could go on. And this is clearly nothing new. Our reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians is talking about a significant conflict at the time – and that was the conflict between the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews simply hated the Gentiles: they made that very clear in the construction of the temple.

The temple consisted of a series of courts, each one a little higher than the one that went before, with the Temple itself in the inmost of the courts. First, there was the Court of the Gentiles; then the Court of the Women; then the Court of the Israelites; then the Court of the Priests; and finally, the Holy Place itself. Which court you were allowed into reflected how close to God the Jews believed you should be allowed to get. The Gentiles were furthest away. Only into the first of these courts could a Gentile come. Between it and the Court of the Women (and how the Old Testament Jews saw women is another question altogether – but also for another day) between these two courts there was a wall, or rather a kind of screen of marble, beautifully made, and set into it at intervals were tablets which announced that if Gentiles proceeded any further, they were liable to instant death.

But it was not only the Jews that put up barriers. The Greeks saw that people could be divided into two classes: Greeks and barbarians – a barbarian being someone who could not speak Greek, and they would do all they could to put barriers in the way of any barbarian who tried to better him or herself.

But neither is this problem of barriers confined to the ancient world. As the Jesuit, Father Taylor of Boston, used to say, "There is just enough room in the world for all the people in it, but there is no room for the fences which separate them".

So returning to Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, he claims, talking about the division between the Jews and the Gentiles, that, "Jesus has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility between us." But how did he do that?

Paul says of Jesus, "He is our peace". What did he mean by that? Suppose two people have a difference and decide to take their difference to a lawyer. The lawyer draws up a document, which states both points of view, and asks the two parties to come to an agreement based on this document. That is very unlikely to produce a solution. But suppose that someone who each of the parties loves comes to them and talks the issues through with them, there is every chance that an agreement can be made.

That is what Jesus does. He is our peace. It is in a shared love for him that people can come together and remove those barriers.

But Paul also says that Jesus, "has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances." What does this one mean – surely, he is not advocating a lawless society? The Jews believed that only by keeping the Jewish law was an individual considered good and able to achieve the friendship and fellowship of God. But those initial laws had been developed into thousands and thousand of

commandments and decrees – how hands should be washed, how dishes should be washed, what could and couldn't be done on the Sabbath day. The only people who fully kept the Jewish laws were the Pharisees, and there were only about 6,000 of them.

So in the place of these laws Jesus put the love for God and love for other people.

In France, during the Second World War, some soldiers with their sergeant brought the body of a dead comrade to the cemetery of the local Roman Catholic church, to have him buried. The priest told them gently that he was bound to ask if their comrade had been a baptised member of the Roman Catholic Church. They said that they did not know. The priest said that he was very sorry but, in that case, he could not permit burial in his churchyard. So, the soldiers took their comrade sadly and buried him just outside the fence. The next day they came back to see that the grave was alright and to their astonishment could not find it. Search as they might they could find no trace of the freshly dug soil. As they were about to leave in bewilderment the priest came up. He told them that his heart had been troubled because of his refusal to allow their dead comrade to be buried in the churchyard. So early in the morning he had risen from his bed, and with his own hands had moved the fence to include the body of the soldier who had died for France.

That is what love can do. The rules and the regulations put up the fence, but love moved it. Jesus removed the fences between individuals because he abolished all religion founded on rules and regulations and brought to everyone a religion whose foundation is love.

If only the world could move more towards a society based on love, we would surely see fewer of those conflicts which destroy so many peoples' lives.

Amen.