

Veterans' Day Homily *

November 11, 2018

Fr. Soprano

Today we commemorate 100 years to the day the First World War ended. Can we imagine 40 million of anything? More than this were the men and women who served in this war. It was the worst war in human history. More than half (21 million) were wounded, maimed, or died in sickness.

Our service men and women answered this call to war after the Canadian, English, Belgian, French and Italian had already answered. Just getting to war was bad but to fight in wet trenches and bad weather was worse.

The burial places across Europe speak of the atrocities as well as the number who did as Americans.

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| Aisne-Marne | 2,289 | Oise-Aisne | 6,012 |
| Brookwood | 468 | Somme | 1,844 |
| Lafayette Escadrille | 51 | St. Mihiel | 4,153 |
| Meuse-Argonne | 14,246 | Suresnes | 1,565 |
| | Flanders Field | 368 | |

What speaks more heinous is to know more died because of war related Famine and disease than by combat.

Pope Benedict XV had just been elected Pope in 1914, a few months before the war began. His first encyclical 1 November 1914 called for people to leave nothing undone to hasten the end to this calamity. He called it the suicide of Europe. He asked for charity and love to overpower injustice and authority. His words were met with contempt, and the war raged on.

He spent over 80 million gold lire from his personal and Vatican resources to bring humanitarian efforts to the thousands of wounded and sick civilians, staving off starvation and homelessness. Many called it the second Red Cross.

Sadly, for all these efforts, the Victors excluded Germany and the Vatican from peaceful negotiations. In 1920, the Pope's encyclical prophesied there would be no stable peace or lasting treaty unless there is a return to mutual charity to appease hatred and banish enmity. He sought a peace thru European unity as a project for reconciliation.

The League of Nations, which was a first attempt failed miserably.

Ever so, the message he prophesied remained unchanged. By June 1919 at the Treaty of Versailles, the peace that would end all wars, became the peace that ended all peace. Twenty years later, World War II developed just as the Pope prophesied.

Today, we pause at 11 o'clock ~ the 11th day, the 11th month ~ for one minute to remember the dead.

The New Jersey Knights of Columbus poet, Joyce Kilmer, one of many poets from that war, will try to speak for the fallen silent:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
They mark our place; and in the sky
The larks still bravely singing...

Ironic that this man would be shot before the war's end by a sniper's bullet on July 30, 1918.

No survivors live to speak. My Uncle Sam, my mother's brother, served for this county in this Great War. He survived the war only to be killed at sea near Florida in 1935.

I remember him with all his comrades who fought to protect us. May they know Christ's promise fulfilled: "Come to me, and I will give you peace."

*From the article by Campbell, Al. "Remembering War's End 100 Years Ago." *Cape May County Herald*. 7 November 2018. Web. 12 November 2018.

*From the article by de Dreuzy, Agnes. "Pope Benedict XV: Prophet of Peace." Columbia. 1 November 2018. Web. 12 November 2018.