

**Remembrance Sunday, 14th November, 2010
St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.**

My brothers and sisters, I am told by reliable sources that the planet on which we are worshipping here this afternoon is four and a half billion years old. We are beginning to get a grasp of such figures recently since we have been asked to cut 4 billion euros from our public spending in the next financial year. So, our imaginations are becoming conversant with such staggering figures. Let us then move from billions to thousands and then down to hundreds to get some perspective on where we are now. As a species we arrived on the planet fairly recently. Experts suggest that in our modern mode we were first sighted about 50,000 years ago. Nor was it always certain that we would survive. It took us until 1800 AD to achieve a living population of one billion. But now, in this blessed 21st century, we have been increasing by a billion every ten years. So, we are here to stay, or at least to leave our mark. Our recorded history, of some five thousand years has not been a very pretty tale in the telling. The last century we have been through was probably the bloodiest on record.

Humanity's fight for survival has, however, often been heroic. We stand here today in gratitude and awe as we remember all those who laid down their lives so that we might live in the comparative wellbeing and freedom which we presently enjoy. Remembrance Day is a memorial of all who died for us since the twentieth century began. World War I, which ended at the 11th hour, on the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, was an immense outpouring of life and love, given nobly and generously for others in crude and savage circumstance. The poppy was chosen as its emblem because 'like a yawn of fire from the grass it came' to cover Flanders, the bloodiest of battlefields.

The Twentieth Century was perhaps still a time when war could be justified as a way of achieving peace. The many dedicated and courageous people whom we celebrate on this remembrance day gave their lives to dreadful wars, to preserve our freedom, and prevent the spread of evil. However, we must listen carefully to the words of W.H.Auden's Epitaph for the Unknown Soldier: 'To save your world you asked this man to die; would this man, could he see you now, ask why?'

Those whom we honour here today, went to war because they believed that a certain quality of life was being threatened. Their sacrifice and their act of warfare implied the possibility of victory for one side over the other. The nuclear age has revoked that possibility. From now on, preservation of our species can only be accomplished through peace. War, which was in the past the final guarantee of our freedom and our existence, has now become the ultimate enemy, the unprecedented threat to survival. Any such warfare today could result in total annihilation of all sides. We can no longer afford to go to war.

Love, as Jesus Christ came on earth to display it, is as yet only in its infancy. Love in its present form is often no more than a feeling we have for a very few other human beings. Just as reason in the animal kingdom, before the evolution of rational consciousness, was no more than a vague striving towards the organ of the brain, so love as we experience it now is only a rudimentary token of what it could be, if we were to live it in a way that allowed our hearts to make a similar breakthrough. As rationality evolved through time, so love reveals itself as we journey forward to our origin and our end. The end is nigh. The end is now. Some optimists today hope that the incremental increase of humanity, the tightening of the human mass, which necessarily throws us together, will force us to enter the powerful, still unknown field of our basic affinities. Such people believe 'in the hidden existence and eventual

release of forces of attraction between people which are as powerful in their own way as nuclear energy appears to be.' Let us pray for the realisation of such an eventuality. And not just pray, but set about the task of undertaking such heart-work: the development within each of us of that huge leap towards the ultimate love of humanity which would lift us forever out of our warmongering proclivities. Such a development would be as startling and as transformative as the dawning of consciousness, which differentiated us from the animal world and made us into human beings as we now experience that state. The difference between these two leaps forward - that of the mind and that of the heart - is this: rational consciousness emerged in us, without our help or our permission; the needed breakthrough in the realm of love could only happen in us and through us, it could not happen in spite of us. As a human race we will have to learn how to love in a new and dramatic way: the way laid down for us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ by the simple formula: love your enemy. Such a love is eternally a new way of living on the planet. It can only begin its global existence through the tiny flame cultivated today in your heart and in my heart. Eventually it would then fan into an irresistible conflagration, so that 'in the end,' as Rainer Maria Rilke expresses it, 'we shall have been marvellously prepared for divine relationship'.

Amen.