

Thought for the Week 10th May 2020

It's good to be able to join with you for another thought for the week. Even though we cannot physically be together, we can still be united as we take a little time to worship God.

You can see a recording of this thought, together with some songs and prayers on You Tube (by following the link <https://youtu.be/xSs2juNRDO0>). It was recorded in Loanends Church building on the weekend when we commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE Day marking end of the Second World War in Europe on 8th May 1945.

It's now almost seven weeks since the Prime Minister, Boris Johnston, announce the lockdown measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. That's nearly 50 days of being deprived of our freedom to do exactly what we like, wherever we like to do it. And the news bulletins are full of speculation about when we will be able to get back to normal, or a least to a "new normal" - whatever that means!

This weekend, as we look back 75 years ago to grainy black and white footage of the celebrations on VE Day on the 8th May 1945, I'm not sure that those of us who did not live through the Second World War can fully appreciate why there was so much rejoicing on that day. Here we are complaining about a few weeks of restrictions, but back then they had just come through six long years of war with not just the terrible loss of life - almost half a million people perished - but all the trauma of the destruction from bombing, as well as the severe restrictions on normal life. It's hard for us to appreciate what the rationing of food, clothing and fuel was like. I was reminded of this recently when I came across these/some old Ration Books among my late father's papers. I didn't realize that rationing actually lasted for over 14 years and only came to an end in 1954.

A couple of months ago there was a lot of panic buying in shops in case we ran out of essential items (which of course, we haven't), but back in the days of rationing each person had to survive on a weekly ration of 50g butter, 100g margarine, 50g tea, 100g of bacon or ham, 1 fresh egg and meat to the value of 1 shilling & 2 pence! Potatoes, vegetables and fruit were not rationed but were often in short supply.

No doubt many of you are suffering withdrawal symptoms from not being able to go shopping for new clothes and shoes (men maybe just as much as women), but back then each person had just 60 clothing coupons to use each year (it was later reduced to 40). Ladies that would have got you 1 coat, 1 dress, 2 blouses, 2 skirts, 2 pairs of stockings, 1 pair of shoes or boots and a scarf or a pair of gloves - for a whole year!. Travel was very restricted and petrol was rationed to 5 gallons per month per car, except for essential workers. So, when we think back to what the war generation had to suffer, and how they came through it, maybe our trials and tribulations will seem light in comparison.

And, while it is right and proper that we should commemorate and give thanks at this time that the evil tyranny of Nazism was finally defeated, we also need to remember the terrible cost in

lives that were lost in the process. So, we now humbly remember all those who served and especially those who gave their lives for the justice and freedom that we enjoy.

President Trump recently said that he thought of himself as a "Wartime President." I don't usually rate much that Donald Trump says, but we are, in a way, in a war situation today. We are fighting against a silent and unseen enemy that has done so much to disrupt human society. The fight against the coronavirus is indeed a "world war." Our weapons against it seem to be few, and when you see our wonderful frontline healthcare workers dressed in full PPE - you can be in no doubt they are the frontline troops in the battle.

The Bible reminds us that we are also in another war situation. Here is what Paul says in Ephesians 6:10-18:

¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Be in no doubt that we are engaged in a spiritual battle. While many today would ridicule that idea of a personal "devil," the bible is clear that there is a spiritual force of evil that is fighting against God and that we in the middle of that war. So, we all need personal protection equipment to resist it. Our protection is not masks, gowns and gloves, but what Paul calls, "the armour of God." We all need this armour - truth, like a belt around our waist, righteousness like armour covering our vital organs, strong faith that is like a shield deflecting whatever the enemy may throw at us. And, of course, we need our minds to be protected by the helmet of salvation - knowing that we have inner peace and forgiveness through our faith in Christ. There is one more thing which Paul mentions that we need - the only thing that is a weapon - the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert (see Matthew 4) he countered his attacks by quoting scripture. We can do the same. It is a powerful weapon, but only if we have it in our hands.

Whatever this week, and the future before us holds- whether we are fighting against a virus or an even more potent spiritual enemy, let's take inspiration from the generation which 75 years ago rejoiced in victory, knowing that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has won the victory for us.

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