
My Sermon from Sunday November 14, 2021, "Remembrance Sunday" ~ "The Cross And The Poppy"

I speak to you in the name of the cross of Christ. Amen.

On **Remembrance Day**, November 11, 2021, the outdoor service at City Hall was cancelled due to the downpouring of rain and the high winds. I was scheduled to be the clergy person to speak at the service, to give the invocation and the benediction. I decided to drive over to Waverley Park and attend that outdoor service and then go inside to St. Paul's United where my husband **Jouni** and parishioner **David Nock** were the cantors at this service, led by Chaplain and Anglican priest **Nancy Ringham**.

As I walked to *Waverley Park* from a parking spot several blocks away, the strong wind turned my umbrella inside out and I fought it all the way to the park. When I got there, I stood, along with many other people braving the elements, quietly and expectantly. The trees shook as the strong winds blew throughout the park and the pouring rain made me shiver very quickly. As I looked up at the bare branches and felt the mud beneath my feet, my thoughts quickly turned to the men in the trenches in France and Belgium in World War I. Within 15 minutes, I was cold, and damp, and shivering. Imagine spending months and months in the trenches always wet, always cold, always hungry, with the constant fear of dying from a sniper's bullet. Our wool clothing would have been filled with lice and our feet would have become blackened through long immersion in cold water and mud. That is what was called "trench foot."

The hymn that you heard this morning, "*O God, Our Help In Ages Past*," contains these words: "*Our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home.*" In the midst of the blustery Remembrance Day weather, these words had new and deeper meaning for me.

The most significant symbol of Remembrance Day is the red poppy, based upon the poem *In Flanders Fields* written by **Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae** in 1915 during World War I ~

*"In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
between the crosses row on row"*

The idea for the Remembrance Poppy was conceived by **Madame Anna Guérin** of France. She was inspired by **John McCrae's** poem *In Flanders Fields*. Anna had originally founded a charity to help rebuild regions of France torn apart by the First World War, and created poppies made of fabric to raise funds.

And what happened next?

Parishioner **Bonnie Schiedel** has written an illuminating article about the history of the poppy for the *Northern Ontario Travel Magazine*. Here are her words:

In 1921, Madame Anna E. Guérin traveled to both Britain and Canada to propose making the poppy a symbol of remembrance for soldiers killed in the Great War. Her first Canadian stop was a meeting of the Great War Veterans Association of Canada (a predecessor of the Legion) held at Thunder Bay's Prince Arthur Hotel on Cumberland St.

At the meeting on July 4, the members decided to adopt the poppy as its "Flower of Remembrance," and that November, poppies were distributed in Canada for the first time.

Here is the plaque that is displayed in the lobby of the Prince Arthur:

The original poppies were sewn out of fabric. Parishioner and legion member **Marion Leat** gave me one of these **commemoration poppies** to celebrate the 100th

anniversary of the poppy's use in Canada. Here it is. **This is what the original poppies of 1921 looked like.** (I hold up the poppy.)

The poppy is a symbol of remembrance



and is always worn on the left hand side of our chests over our hearts.

Physical symbols are significant to us as they represent greater truths. Every time I saw parishioner and newscaster **Fiona Gardiner** wearing a poppy on TV, I was moved and drawn into the story of the sacrifice of all who fight for peace and justice.

The POPPY.

The Christian symbol of the **CROSS** draws you and me into the story of our salvation. In our gospel this morning for Remembrance Sunday, we have a conversation with Jesus in which Jesus explains that because he is doing the will of God, his Father, we are to turn to Jesus and I am quoting from the gospel:

“That all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life.” (John 6:40)

I must tell you that my ‘spell checker’ is not Christian. When I typed in “Son” and not “Sun,” the word Son was double-underlined meaning that I had made a mistake and spelled it incorrectly.

Where and when do we see the Son? When we evoke his name, when we look at the Christ in each other, when we expect to see him at all times and in all places, when we pray.

The apostle Peter writes that Jesus is a living hope, and that **we are protected by the power of God through faith for we have received our salvation.** (1 Peter 1:3-5). During our time in this world, we will all suffer at times but we have the deep joy that comes from loving God.

It took hundreds of years before the cross became the most significant symbol of our faith. It wasn't until Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Holy Roman Empire that people began to use crosses in worship and as pieces of jewellery.

The most important symbol in the early days of Christianity was the fish. The acronym of the Greek word for fish is 'ichthus' and each Greek letter stands for this:



“JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD, SAVIOUR.”

- **iota (i)** is the first letter of **Iesous** (Greek for “Jesus”)
- **Chi (kh)** is the first letter of **Khristos** (Greek for “Christ”)
- **Theta (th)** is the first letter of **Theou** (Greek for “God,” or God’s)
- **Upsilon (u)** is the first letter of **Huios** (Greek for “Son”)
- **Sigma (s)** is the first letter of **Soter** (Greek for “Saviour”)

We rarely use the fish today, though I have seen it sometimes on the bumpers of cars, but the cross is ubiquitous. I can certainly understand why the cross was not used for centuries ~ it was an instrument of torture. When we look at the cross today, we see our salvation. But in the first century people would have seen horror and torture. If Jesus had come to earth in the 21st century and then been sacrificed by an injection, would you wish to see a needle on the altar or have one tattooed on your leg? How would you feel in Christian baptism if the line of a needle were traced on your forehead? Instead of an ash cross traced on your forehead at the beginning of Lent, how would you feel if it was an ash needle?

The cross has power to remind us of what God did for us. May we always remember the strength and the power of our God to bless us, to save us, to redeem us. **“The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God.”** (Wisdom 3:1)

May the **cross of Christ** and **the poppy** keep us focused and thankful. **“Lest we forget . . .”**
Lest we forget.

Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+

Editor's Note: Parishioner **Marion Leat** has a supply of these special fabric **“Commemorative Replica 1921 Poppies”** for sale. The cost is **\$10** per poppy, with all monies going to support veterans through the work of the Legion. Please contact **Marion** at **473-4748** to order your poppies. They make wonderful gifts!

