

Heart for the Poor ANZAC Day today April 20 2010

I have had the privilege of leading the Mt Roskill ANZAC Day services as the Chairman of the Community Board for a number of years now. In the past ANZAC Day commemorations have tended to reflect the prevailing mood of the day. In the 1940's they were strongly focused on remembrance of the wars in which New Zealanders had taken part. The religious aspects of the day have caused contention. For a time the RSA wanted to remove religion from the ceremonies altogether. Roman Catholics were prevented by their own rules from attending such ecumenical services, and many Catholic and Jewish returned service personnel did not attend Anzac Day ceremonies. Protestant churches protested as the day was, in their view, already too secular, but in 1965 churches finally resolved their differences.

The 60s and 70s saw services caught up in Anti-war protests. In the 80s lobby groups such as feminists, gays, anti-nuclear peace protestors and Maori Activists all saw the day as an opportunity to promote their cause. Since then and with the passing on of veterans a new interest is emerging particularly from young people who will often be seen wearing their Granddad's (or Grandma's) medals at the dawn parade or ANZAC Day service. Why do they come? I believe we all seek to be part of a bigger story. In so doing, we have to grasp the meaning of that intangible concept "nationhood".

What does it mean today to be a Kiwi? At our local Highschool in Mt Roskill there are over 100 languages spoken. Many students were born in countries that are today in great turmoil with their parents being forced to leave to ensure the safety of their families. When I attend Citizenship ceremonies genuine pride is evident as the folk recite the Oath of Citizenship "*I [name] swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of New Zealand, Her heirs and successors according to law, and that I will faithfully observe the laws of New Zealand and fulfil my duties as a New Zealand citizen. So help me God. .*" So help me God... New citizens then join in the singing of 'God defend New Zealand' before enjoying a cup of tea. There is a lot going on here isn't there. Many of those making that commitment will not be Christian, yet the traditions of Christianity are written all over the event just as most ANZAC Day ceremonies are recognised with prayers, hymns and usually an address by a Minister. So can we say Nationhood in New Zealand includes concepts of Christian faith?

The ministry of Jesus was saturated with acts promoting Peace on Earth, goodwill amongst all men, being a servant, justice, righteousness and love. I give praise to God that these concepts are part of the faith still recognised as one of the building blocks of our nation. No one is alive today who actually farewelled their loved ones to fight for what was believed at the time was the right thing to do in Gallipoli. Does that mean the word sacrifice lacks meaning today? Kiwi's are constantly leaving the comforts of home to serve their country or those in need. Some are in uniform, others are meeting humanitarian crises. One of these is TEAR Fund's Senior Programme officer Ian McInnes who has gone to Haiti to head up our Disaster Relief programme there.

In closing listeners consider what it means to be a Christian New Zealander, and the role we have in bringing peace and goodwill to the world. Dwell on what those around you see of Christ in you. I will finish with a quote by Mother Teresa "Help one person at a time, and always start with the person nearest you." In doing this you will provide answers to the yearning I see in the eyes of those who attend the ANZAC Day.

Prayer: Father God this ANZAC Day we lift before you those who went to serve God, their King and country. We lift before you those who today are serving in uniform, or as part of humanitarian relief efforts. Grant them safety. We lift before you their families and loved ones, grant them peace of heart. Amen.