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## **HOMILY BY BISHOP CHARLES J. SCICLUNA**

### **DURING PONTIFICAL MASS ON THE OCCASION OF REMEMBRANCE DAY**

Your Excellency,

Brothers and Sisters,

We are gathered here today, as is customary every year on Remembrance Day, to commemorate the victims of the two World Wars, which, as we all know, were great tragedies. The theologian Karl Rahner once wrote “the memory is the faculty to forget”. If we have a right to forget, today it is our duty to remember! We call to mind all those innocent victims which were sent to their death by people in power sitting behind their desks.

Such were the sentiments of frustration, anger and sorrow that were expressed so eloquently by a generation of English poets who are known as *The Great War Poets*, among them Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, who both experienced the horrors of war.

16 million people died during the First World War which began one hundred years ago, in 1914. Twenty million others were wounded during this war, which introduced wide-spread destructive weapons such as chemical gas and heavy artillery. This war introduced new ways in which we injure and kill one another.

The Second World War, which took place between 1939 and 1945, was an even greater tragedy, leaving millions of people dead as a result of fighting, persecution and hunger. Over 60 million people died in the Second World War. More than 22 million of these were civilians and innocent victims. These figures are very saddening, particularly when we realise that behind every number there are human beings. This reality should lead us to reflect, and more so, make a commitment in favour of world stability and peace. We need to remember these innocent victims in order to have the courage and humility to overcome all that separates us, and at one and the same time, remember those events which came to pass in the world. We cannot forget the sacrifices of these people, nor can we forget the beautiful moments of true human solidarity which was displayed during a time of such cruelty and conflict.

Today I wish to recall an extraordinary event which occurred at Christmastime in 1914. This was the moment when the German, French and also British troops laid down their guns to celebrate Christmas. They sang carols and erected a small Christmas tree in the space between the trenches known as *no man's land*. It is also said that they played a football match. For those few moments, it seems as if they forgot they were enemies and instead rejoiced



## THE CHURCH IN MALTA

together at the birth of the Infant Jesus. In English, this extraordinary moment is known as *The Christmas Truce*, in German *Weihnachtsfrieden*, in French *Trêve de Noël*. A film was produced in 2005 to commemorate this event, entitled '*Joyeux Noël*', which served as an inspiration for the opera, '*Silent Night*', which won the *Pulitzer Prize for Music* in 2012.

During that moment of ceasefire, the British, French and German soldiers, who were officially enemies, realized that the birth of Jesus Christ is a light which reminds us that every man, whoever he may be, is a human person, God's creation, and therefore we are all children of the same Father. The words 'enemy', 'aggressor' or 'defender' are nothing but labels which are given by humans to each other, because, in reality, we are all part of the same family. Let us pray that we may overcome these labels and promote human dignity which unites us, and for which Jesus Christ gave up his life. "There is no greater love than this, that one gives up his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). The sacrifice of these innocent people, who were condemned to death by their politicians, puts upon our own politicians a great responsibility, that they may strive to build in our world a culture of peace, founded upon justice.

Unfortunately, even today, there are various conflicts and wars in the world, which Pope Francis describes as the third world war, constituting new modes of aggression. Sometimes this hatred and cruelty is being perpetrated in the name of religion. Barbaric acts are performed which we have never before heard of, or which are reminiscent of the barbarity two thousand years ago. When we see pictures and footage of such cruelty on the media, we ask: How can a man display such cruelty towards another man like him? How can the slaughter of the innocent be justified in the name of God?

Therefore, Remembrance Day is also a reminder that mankind, in the name of God, is capable of committing endless barbaric acts. Let us pray to the God of Peace to heal our wounds and soften the callous hearts of mankind.

As we commemorate those who died in the World Wars and in other conflicts, let us also bring to mind our brothers and sisters, those Maltese citizens who have opted for a military career. We are in need of people to defend the spirit of democracy and tolerance which are values so dear to us. This is not an invitation to irenism, or a refusal to use arms, rendering it impossible to defend ourselves. Rather it is an invitation for Malta to play an active role in the international community, which we joined 50 years ago, so that we may take concrete steps to promote an authentic human family in which, in spite of the differences between us, one can live in peace built on tolerance and reciprocal respect.

### ✠ **Charles J. Scicluna**

Titular Bishop of San Leone and Apostolic Administrator sede vacante