



**Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2025**

***Victory in Europe Day (VE Day)***

**Gospel Reading**

**Luke 15.18–32**

<sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’” <sup>20</sup> So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup> He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” <sup>28</sup> Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” <sup>31</sup> Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”’

**Other Readings: Micah 4.1–4; Zechariah 8.3–8 ; 2 Corinthians 5.16–21**

**Homily**

Recently, to mark this 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day, the BBC showed a programme of interviews with a group of remarkable people who had been involved in the events which led up to that day in May 1945. They are now an elderly and shrinking group of survivors of the cataclysmic conflict which came to an end on that day. They are among the last representatives of a generation who took part in the struggle to resist and overcome the worst evil which has befallen our world; and we rightly pay tribute to them on anniversaries like this one. But for them our lives might be very different.

It was a conflict which claimed the lives of untold millions: soldiers in combat, civilians caught up in the violence; Jews, Roma, homosexuals and other victims of Nazi genocide. Millions more were left displaced, homeless and hungry, traumatized by their experiences.

The victors were faced with two options in dealing with their defeated enemies; choices we might think of as represented by the responses of the welcoming Father and the elder brother who resents this treatment of the returning prodigal in the Parable.

One was to demand justice and exact vengeance for the crimes against humanity committed by Hitler's Third Reich. The people of Germany should be made to pay for all this suffering. They must be stripped of the power to do it again. This was the position taken by the Soviet Union under Stalin. Even among the western allies some called for Germany to be reduced to a rural agrarian society without the industrial might to be a military power.

Nations and their leaders do not always learn the lessons of history – and so are doomed to repeat its mistakes – but in this case, wiser voices had learned from the way in which the punitive clauses of the Versailles Treaty had undermined democracy and the rule of law in Germany and so paved the way for the rise of the Nazis. While there was rightly an effort to bring to justice those responsible for crimes against humanity, it was recognised that if there was to be peace in Europe reconciliation was a better guarantee of peace. If punishment was to be the last word then the cycle of resentment and revenge might well be repeated. But the allies also found themselves responsible for feeding a starving German people. To their credit they got on and fed them, even though this meant continued food rationing in Britain. Much of the continent was in ruins and needed to be rebuilt. Mercy comes at a cost to the merciful – but they will be blessed.

Is all this just so much history, of interest perhaps to scholars, but of no relevance to ordinary folk like us? Well the politics which is based on the relentless propagation of lies, of resentment at supposed victimhood and the scapegoating of those blamed for it, are on the rise again across our world and in our nation. Holocaust denial and anti-semitism, islamophobia and racism are all on the rise. Distrust of the public institutions which support our society is widespread. Impatience with the patient commitment and mutual respect on which democracy depends, leads to demands for strong leaders who will cut through the compromises to solve our problems in a moment is heard again. This was the strategy perfected by Hitler and Goebbels. It worked in the Germany of the 1930s, with tragic consequences, and it might well work again.

The rise of fascism was the greatest moral challenge, not just to democracy, but to the Christian Church in Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While there were noble and courageous exceptions, whom we celebrate, it has to be said that much of the Church failed to meet the challenge presented by lies, hatred.

So today, we look back both to give thanks and to learn lessons; that the sacrifice of so many might not have been in vain; that the freedoms they fought to defend at such cost not be frittered carelessly away.

### **Conversation Questions**

1. Imagine that you are a Jewish prisoner in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. You have just been liberated by the British Army, but most of your family have not survived the Holocaust. How would you feel towards the German people? Would you want justice? How hard would it be for you to even consider reconciliation with people who either committed such crimes or colluded in creating the hell on earth you had been cast into?
2. Imagine that you are a German – either a soldier now a prisoner-of-war – or a civilian trying to survive. How would you expect to be treated by the occupying forces? Would you hope for mercy or fear vengeance? Would you feel any sense of responsibility or guilt for what had happened? Could you say, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you?”
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

### **Prayer**

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

### **Collect of the day**

*Almighty God,  
from whom all thoughts of truth and peace proceed:  
kindle in the hearts of all people the true love of peace;  
and guide with your pure and peaceable wisdom  
those who take counsel for the nations of the earth;  
that in tranquillity your kingdom may go forward,  
till the earth is filled with the knowledge of thy love;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, material from which is incorporated in this service paper, is copyright © The Archbishops' Council, 2000. Scripture passage from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised) copyright © 1989, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.