**REMEMBRANCE DAY 2022**

MY FOCUS FOR TODAY’S ADDRESS IS THAT OF LOSS.

ANY DISCUSSION ON THE COST OF WAR IS USUALLY FOCUSED ON THE NUMBER OF CASUALTIES; I HAVE BEEN CONSIDERING THE LOSSES WE, AS INDIVIDUALS, AND MANKIND IN GENERAL, INCUR IN A WAR.

HISTORY IS A STORY. A STORY FROM THE PAST WHICH SHINES A LIGHT ON THE PRESENT. EVERY LIFE IS A STORY. STORIES SHOULD HAVE A BEGINNING, A MIDDLE AND AN END. WHEN A LIFE FINISHES BEFORE THE STORY IS TOLD, BEFORE THE SONGS ARE SUNG, BEFORE THE PLAYS ARE ACTED THE STORY IS UNFINISHED. WE HAVE THEN LOST THE END OF THAT STORY AND WILL NEVER KNOW WHERE IT WOULD HAVE LED, WHAT DISCOVERIES IT WOULD HAVE MADE, WHAT EFFECT IT WOULD HAVE HAD ON OTHERS – FOR BETTER OR ILL. THIS IS THE MEANING OF LOSS.

VICKTOR FRANKL WROTE THAT MANKIND HAS SUFFERED A LOSS IN HIS MORE RECENT DEVELOPMENT INASMUCH AS THE TRADITIONS (OF WHICH TEVYE SANG IN ‘FIDDLER ON THE ROOF’) WHICH BUTTRESSED HIS BEHAVIOR ARE NOW RAPIDLY DIMINISHING.

NO INSTINCT TELLS HIM WHAT HE HAS TO DO, AND NO TRADITION TELLS HIM WHAT HE OUGHT TO DO; SOMETIMES HE DOES NOT EVEN KNOW WHAT HE WISHES TO DO. INSTEAD, HE EITHER WISHES TO DO WHAT OTHER PEOPLE DO (CONFORMISM) OR HE DOES WHAT OTHER PEOPLE TELL HIM TO DO (TOTALITARIANISM).

IF A DESPOT IS NOT UNDER YOUR FEET HE IS AT YOUR THROAT. THERE SEEMS SADLY NO THIRD POSITION.

CHINA AND RUSSIA ARE TODAY’S EXAMPLES. WHERE THIS WILL LEAD DEPENDS ON THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC WILL TO RESIST.

RESIST AT WHATEVER COST.

RESIST AT WHATEVER SACRIFICES.

ONE DESPOT HAS BEEN WOUNDED AND EMBARRASSED. A WOUNDED BEAR IS FAR MORE DANGEROUS THAN ONE ROAMING FREELY THROUGH HIS OWN FOREST.

VERA LYNN SANG IN WWII, PRAYING THAT “JIMMY WOULD GO TO SLEEP IN HIS OWN LITTLE ROOM AGAIN” BUT SO MANY JIMMY’S NEVER SAW THEIR ROOMS AGAIN. SO MANY PARENTS HAD TO CLEAR OUT THOSE ROOMS AND DISPOSE OF THEIR SON’S LIVES WEEPING OVER WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN. THIS WAS THEIR ON-GOING LOSS.

WILFRED OWEN IS REGARDED BY MANY AS THE GREATEST POET OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR, KNOWN FOR HIS VERSE ABOUT THE HORRORS OF TRENCH AND GAS WARFARE. AFTER HIS DEATH IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE WAR, HIS POCKET BOOK CAME BACK TO HIS MOTHER WITH THESE WORDS. “WHEN I GO FROM HENCE, LET THIS BE MY PARTING WORD, THAT WHAT I HAVE SEEN IS UNSURPASSABLE”. THESE LINES WERE WRITTEN BY INDIA’S RABINDRANATH TAGORE WHO SOOTHED THE PAIN OF LOSS WHEN HE WROTE “DEATH IS NOT EXTINGUISHING THE LIGHT; IT IS ONLY PUTTING OUT THE LAMP BECAUSE THE DAWN HAS COME.” HE ALSO AVERRED “I WILL NEVER ALLOW PATRIOTISM TO TRIUMPH OVER HUMANITY AS LONG AS I LIVE.” SADLY, IT SEEMS PATRIOTISM IS THE FIRST FRUIT TO SHOOT IN THE SOILS OF WAR.

JOHN STEINBECK, IN ‘THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT’ ADDRESSED LOSS WHEN HE WROTE “IT'S SO MUCH DARKER WHEN A LIGHT GOES OUT THAN IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IF IT HAD NEVER SHONE.”

THIS ‘LOSS’ IS THE WAY THOSE NOT INTIMATELY INVOLVED IN THE WAR SUFFER ALONG WITH THOSE WHO DIE. IT IS LEFT TO THEM TO MOURN FOR A LIFETIME WHAT WAS LOST – NOT JUST IN THE PAST, NOT JUST THAT WHICH THE DECEASED MAY HAVE ATTAINED FOR THEMSELVES BUT ALSO WHAT MAY HAVE BENEFITTED MANKIND ITSELF.

WE ARE ALL INVOLVED IN EACH LOSS AS EACH DIMINISHES THE WHOLE CONTENT OF HUMANITY.

PERHAPS THE GREATEST LOSS WE ALL SUFFER DUE TO WAR IS THAT OF INNOCENCE IN THE YOUNG. ALTHOUGH NOT FULLY UNDERSTOOD BY THEM, A CHILD’S LOSS IS IMMENSELY MORE DAMAGING THAN THAT AFFLICTING AN ADULT. WAR TEACHES THEM LONG BEFORE THEY LEARN BY MATURITY THAT THEIR PARENTS HAVE NO CONTROL OVER THE STUPIDITY OF OTHER ADULTS WHO REFUSE TO LEARN THE LESSONS OF HISTORY. THEIR LOSS OF SECURITY – THAT MOTHER OR FATHER’S ARMS CANNOT PROTECT THEM FROM DANGERS BARELY UNDERSTOOD BUT WHICH ARE VERY REAL BOGEYMEN BEHIND THEIR BEDROOM DOORS. THEIR LOSS OF A FUTURE THEY DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES RATHER THAN ONE IMPOSED UPON THEM BY OTHERS WHO DARE TO TAKE, RUN AND RUIN THEIR WEE LIVES. THE LOSS OF THEIR PAST WHICH, ONCE DESTROYED, BECOMES MERELY A VAGUE MEMORY AND SOON EVEN THAT BLENDS WITH THE MISTS OF TIME TO BE A PHANTOM BELIEF THAT ONCE, LONG AGO, THEIR WAS JOY, LOVE, PEACE, BELONGING.

THIS LOSS MAY NOT BE IMMEDIATELY APPARENT. IT MAY NOT BE OF THAT WHICH WE HAD, HELD AND LOVED. IT MAY BE OF THAT WHICH WAS TO COME, THAT WE NEVER KNEW AND HENCE CANNOT MISS PERSONALLY BUT WHICH, NEVERTHELESS, IS A LOSS TO HUMANITY AS A WHOLE.

I HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM NORTHERN IRELAND AND FELT DEEPLY DISPIRITED WALKING THROUGH THE MURALS IN THE REFURBISHED BOGSIDE OF LONDONDERRY TO SEE A HUGE MURAL EXTOLLING THE LOCAL YOUTH TO “SALUTE THE MEN AND WOMEN OF VIOLENCE”. IT REMINDED ME THAT IN ALL CONFLICTS THE BELIEFS OF ONE SIDE ARE THE SPARK WHICH IGNITES A HATRED AND A FEAR OF THE OTHER SIDE. THIS PLEA IS COUPLED WITH ANOTHER MURAL OF A YOUNG BOY, SCHOOL SOX AROUND HIS ANKLES, PREPARING TO THROW A BURNING MOLOTOV COCKTAIL AT A BRITISH SOLDIER. ONE CAN ONLY FEAR FOR THE FUTURE OF THAT DIVIDED ISLAND.

IF WE DESTROY OUR CHILDREN’S INNOCENCE, WE ALSO DESTROY THEIR AND OUR FUTURE.

IN IRELAND’S COUNTY DONEGAL IS THE BRIDGE OF TEARS. IN THE OLD DAYS PEOPLE MADE THE JOURNEY OUT OF WEST DONEGAL BY FOOT, SOMETIMES WALKING HAND IN HAND WITH EMIGRATING CHILDREN. THEY COULD ONLY WALK SO FAR AND THIS BRIDGE WAS WHERE THEY EMBRACED FOR THE LAST TIME AS POVERTY DIVIDED THEM; THE PARENTS HEADING BACK TO THEIR COTTAGES AND THE CHILDREN HEADING FOR DERRY AND A BOAT TO NEW YORK.

WAR FORCES PEOPLE TO CROSS ANOTHER BRIDGE WITHOUT BIDDING ANYONE FAREWELL. STORIES WILL REMAIN UNFINISHED. HUGS NOT GIVEN AND THUS NOT A COMFORTING MEMORY AS THE YEARS SLIP BY. PARTINGS REMAIN UNRESOLVED.

THE ORIGINATOR OF THE WORDS ‘LEST WE FORGET’, RUDYARD KIPLING, WROTE SOME HEART-BROKEN LINES AFTER THE DEATH OF HIS 18-YEAR-OLD, SHORT-SIGHTED SON, TWICE REJECTED BY THE ARMY AND ONCE BY THE NAVY, BUT COMMISSIONED DUE TO HIS FATHER’S FAME. "IF ANY QUESTION WHY WE DIED / TELL THEM, BECAUSE OUR FATHERS LIED." THE JINGOISTIC RHETORIC THEY POSITED LED TO THE HEARTACHE, LONELINESS AND SELF-RECRIMINATION OF THEIR LOSS DUE TO THEIR SONS HAVING BEEN SWEPT UP IN THE RHETORIC.

THOMAS HARDY’S WONDERFUL ELEGY REMINDS US THAT “PATHS OF GLORY LEAD BUT TO THE GRAVE”. PUTIN AND XI SHOULD MAKE IT REQUIRED READING.

IN MY LIBRARY, ON MY DESK AS A CONSTANT REMINDER IS A BATTERED CIGARETTE CASE CONTAINING TWO STAINED AND BENT TURKISH CIGARETTES WHICH WERE NEVER SMOKED BY THE OWNER OF THE CASE. EMBLAZONED ON THE LID ARE THE WORDS ‘GOT MIT UNS’.

 WHEN BOTH SIDES BELIEVE THE SAME GOD IS ON THEIR SIDE, HENCE GIVING VERISIMILITUDE TO THEIR CAUSE, THE ONLY OUTCOME IS ALWAYS THE SHEDDING OF BLOOD.

A PITY THE CURRENT DUO OF POSTURING DEMAGOGUES DO NOT READ SHELLEY WHERE HE POINTS OUT AN INSCRIPTION ON A PEDESTAL THAT ONCE SUPPORTED A HUGE STATUE OF RAMESES II OF EGYPT. HE AND IT ARE NOW MERE FOOTNOTES TO HISTORY. THE WORDS ON THE PEDESTAL ARE:

*MY NAME IS OZYMANDIAS, KING OF KINGS;*

*LOOK ON MY WORKS, YE MIGHTY, AND DESPAIR!*

THE POET THEN EXPLAINS:

*NOTHING BESIDE REMAINS. ROUND THE DECAY*

*OF THAT COLOSSAL WRECK, BOUNDLESS AND BARE*

*THE LONE AND LEVEL SANDS STRETCH FAR AWAY.”*

IN ONE OF THE ANZAC CEMETERIES ON THE GALLIPOLI PENINSULA A SMALL CONCRETE PLINTH LIES IN MILITARY PRECISION WITH LONG ROWS OF OTHERS. IT COMMEMORATES TROOPER SEAGER OF THE 9TH LIGHT HORSE WHO DIED ON AUGUST 7TH 1915 AGED 17 YEARS. THE INSCRIPTION READS “HE DIED A MAN AND CLOSED HIS LIFE’S BRIEF DAY ERE IT HAD SCARCE BEGUN”. THE LOSS! THE HEART ACHES.

SIDNEY KEYES WROTE POETRY AT SCHOOL AND AT OXFORD BEFORE JOINING THE WEST KENT REGIMENT AS A LIEUTENANT AND DYING IN TUNISIA ON 19TH APRIL 1943. HE WAS POSTHUMOUSLY AWARDED THE HAWTHORNDEN PRIZE (THE NOBEL OF POETRY) JUST PRIOR TO HIS 21ST BIRTHDAY.

HIS WORDS LOSE NOTHING BY BEING COMPARED WITH THOSE OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, THE MASTER AND POET LAUREATE, TO WHOM ONE OF HIS POEMS IS ADDRESSED. WHAT A LOSS WAS HERE. WHAT WORKS MIGHT OUR SOCIETY HAVE GAINED HAD HE NOT BEEN FORCED TO JOIN KEATS, SHELLEY, BYRON, CHATTERTON IN AN EARLY DEATH?

IN SUMMARY. STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT CONFLICT SITUATIONS CAUSE MORE MORTALITY AND DISABILITY THAN ANY MAJOR DISEASE.

MAKE NO MISTAKE. LOSSES IN THE UKRAINE ARE YOUR LOSS, MY LOSS, OUR LOSS, HUMANITIES LOSS.

THE 13TH CENTURY PERSIAN POET, SAADI, WROTE THESE MEMORABLE LINES:

*HUMAN BEINGS ARE MEMBERS OF A WHOLE,*

*IN CREATION OF ONE ESSENCE AND SOUL.*

*IF ONE MEMBER IS AFFLICTED WITH PAIN,*

*OTHER MEMBERS UNEASY WILL REMAIN.*

*IF YOU’VE NO SYMPATHY FOR HUMAN PAIN,*

*THE NAME OF HUMAN YOU CANNOT RETAIN.*

THOSE WHO FIGHT IN WARS

THOSE WHO DIE IN WARS

THOSE WHO SUFFER IN WARS

RARELY START THEM.

FOUR HUNDRED YEARS AGO JOHN DONNE WROTE WORDS WHOSE RELEVANCE IS UNDIMINISHED IN THIS AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA-INDUCED FOCUS ON SELF.

*NO MAN IS AN ISLAND, ENTIRE OF ITSELF.*

*EACH IS A PIECE OF THE CONTINENT, A PART OF THE MAIN.*

*IF A CLOUD OF EARTH BE WASHED AWAY BY THE SEA, EUROPE IS THE LESS;*

*AS IF THY MANOR OR THE MANOR OF THY FRIEND BE.*

*EACH MAN’S DEATH DIMINISHES ME BECAUSE I AM PART OF MANKIND.*

*THEREFORE, NEVER SEND TO ASK FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS,*

*IT TOLLS FOR THEE.”*