

“Here rests in honoured glory an American soldier known but to God.”

Armistice Day – 106 years ago today – marked the end of the war to end all wars; a war in which many left their homes around the world to serve for the freedom of others. Armistice Day is a day to celebrate the freedom we enjoy, but also to commemorate and remember the cost at which it came. It’s a time to reflect on service, sacrifice, and peace – virtues at the heart of our faith and our school.

As we commemorate another Armistice Day, we should aim to do two things: remember and appreciate those who have served us and continue to serve us, and also seek to use these people as an example as we look for others to serve in our own lives.

While we commemorate those who have given their lives in wars and conflicts, we must be aware and grateful of people’s service whose benefits we reap – those in our school, our country, and our world who work daily to better the lives of those around them.

But what about those who founded this school, they are the reason you are here today, and do we even know their names? And those who sacrificed their lives for you and I, do we even know one of them whose names are forever written on the walls of this Chapel?

While it is hard to find a time to remember the many people, maybe take a moment in Chapel. If you struggle to listen to the Reverend, or whoever is doing the homily, look at the names and pick one, and just imagine what life would have been like for them as they walked through the College gates and how they made a decision to leave their home, school, friends, and family to serve in foreign lands.

As a Christian school, we aim to follow Christ’s example. Is there a greater show of service and sacrifice than that demonstrated by

Jesus 2000 years ago, to undergo the most painful and shaming death as he was labelled a criminal and hung up to die?

There was a question raised during a class discussion: if no one was rewarded for acts of service, would they still do them? If the Duke of Edinburgh and the Student Volunteer Army were no longer promoting service and rewarding it, how many people would be willing to give up their own time for others? The consensus was that few would.

I think this is what has changed from previous generations to our own. Millions of people went to serve at war, knowing the chance of death or serious injury was high, yet they went to serve for peace for those who were left at home. In the hymn we will soon sing, there's a line, "Honour their vision on this solemn day: peace known in freedom, peace the only way".

As I opened this address I quoted, "Here rests in honoured glory an American soldier known but to God". These words are engraved on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, across the Potomac River from Washington DC. It is the biggest tomb there – bigger than those of the many presidents who lie at rest because it represents the enormous cost with little praise for those whose bodies were unrecognisable and left in the fields of war.

This level of sacrifice should never be needed but surely war is not needed for people to serve, not for themselves. As Years 9–10 students go off for service and everyone enjoys the Christmas holidays, look for service to others, as he whose birth we celebrate did.

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