

***The Introduction to the City of Coventry Remembrance Sunday
Service at the War Memorial on 9th November 2014
by the Bishop of Coventry***

Lord Mayor, Deputy Lieutenants, Mayor of our twin city of Volgograd and, on this 25th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the Deputy Mayor of Kiel, Members of Parliament, Members of the City Council, Members of Her Majesty's Armed Forces and other uniformed bodies, People of Coventry: I invite you to prepare for our city's Remembrance Service.

It is always a solemn occasion when we gather as a city on this day. Whatever our Faith or beliefs, whatever our background or nationality we are here together to remember those who have suffered in war, especially those who have laid down their lives in the cause of freedom.

Whenever war is remembered in this city the night of November 14 1940 is always on our minds: the dark night when the skies were lit with the burning of our city and the death of our people.

At the same time, when we come together in this Memorial Park, first opened in 1921, the 3500 Coventrians who died in the First World War weigh heavily on our hearts. Their memory, and the memory of everyone who died from every nation in that most dreadful of wars, is especially real to us in 2014, one hundred years after that war began.

By now, in November 1914, four months into the Great War, around 90,000 British and Commonwealth servicemen had died – nearly three times the capacity of the Ricoh Stadium. At the same point there had been nearly 677,500 German casualties (around twice the population of Coventry) and, in just two early battles, 158,000 Russians had been killed or wounded (and 137,000 taken prisoner) The figures astound us.

As we look back to the past our hearts our minds are also taken to the present, where unspeakable violence and dreadful cruelty have plunged the nations of Syria and Irak into a spiral of violence that seems to have no end and into which our own armed forces are being drawn, facing great danger again.

In the midst of the wreckage of war, we stand as the people of Coventry in this Park set aside to remember the past and to rebuild the future, determined to have hope for humanity. Something of that hope is symbolized in the new World War One sculpture recently unveiled in the park. It consists of three giant metal leaves designed to form a circle of remembrance and reflection.

Leaves are gentle signs of death and of life. As they fall from the trees around us today they remind us of the fallen in battle. But as they give life to the ground on which they fall, they call to mind the verse from the Bible which says that the 'leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations'.

May the brave lives of the men and women who gave their lives for the cause of our freedom and peace and security renew our strength to strain with all our might for the peace of the world and the reconciliation of the nations. And may we draw our deepest hope from Jesus Christ who gave his life for the peace of the world and who was raised from the dead as the ultimate sign that life and love are greater than death and hate.