

Anzac Dawn Parade 2021 – Bulls, New Zealand

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If I were to ask you, “at what ceremony do people take off their caps and throw it in the air?” You would no doubt say “oh, graduation!” If I were to ask you, “at what public ceremony, do two people exchange rings?” You would hopefully say “Wedding”. If I were to ask you, “what kind of ceremony is attached to Anzac Day?” What would you say?

Often we find ourselves lost in the midst of ceremony with no idea of the symbolism attached to it. And yet fully understand ‘that’s just the way it is’ and never venture to gain a deeper perspective.

However, in war, there is no ceremony. In war, there is no symbolism. In war, there is no representation. It is simply, one life; one person; one individual who has volunteered, who has said “yes” to the call to serve Queen and Country. History has taught us that that one life was often younger than what should have been. A 14 year old passing for 17; a tall 15 year old looking 19. But they went, for various reasons. Some precipitated conscription; some for the opportunity of a life-time; some fearful of being labelled a coward and some with a sense of patriotic duty.

As they left our shores, they entered the realm of uncertainty; the realm of the unknown. They were confronted with muddy trenches, flying bullets and grenades and eventually the stench of human flesh. They did not stand on ceremony as they shook with utter fear; there was no symbolism when they shed tears uncontrollably and nothing could re-present the awful sound of grown men calling “Mum” “I want my Mum”! as they breathed their last.

It was gruesome. It was bloody. It was horrific. Such is the nature of war and all too often, this is lost in ceremony.

That is not to say that ceremony is insignificant. The early morning dawn Parade; the marching; the silence; the salutes, form a symbolic tribute and we attach to the ceremony a dignified manner of gratitude, of respect, of honour for those whose voices were silenced in war – in the name of freedom.

Many who saw service drew comfort from the words of our Lord:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me...” (Jn 14:1-6)

We remember those who left our shores but returned never to be the same; we remember those who left our shores, never to return again; we remember those who left our shores and return to us only in dreams. If I were to ask you, “what kind of ceremony is attached to Anzac Day?” What would you say?

Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they and the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.