

## Thought for the Day 11<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Good morning.

The sound of silence will today mark the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month. Inaugurating the first Armistice Day in 1919 King George V called for “all locomotion (to) cease, so that, in perfect stillness, the thoughts of everyone may be concentrated on reverent remembrance of the glorious dead”.

Of course, there was nothing glorious about the way they died. Even those who won the Victoria Cross in the First World War would not have thought that their dying was glorious. The stench of the trenches filled their nostrils. And those young men who survived to become old soldiers were always reluctant to talk about their scars. They of all people knew the brutality of it all.

Yet the King was right to talk about ‘the glorious dead’. Because as we remember those who died we remember that they were someone’s child, someone’s brother or lover; and that their dying for their country pulled aching grief from the hearts of all who loved them. It’s this love that anointed them, turning what was inglorious into something glorious.

One of the deepest silences is the stillness that follows the wailing when a person hears of the tragic death of someone they love. The sobbing subsides, leaving the body once racked, now stilled, exhausted, by grief. How the wailing must have haunted the land a hundred years ago as 750,000 families learned that their loved ones were never coming back. What a silence must have followed – sound sucked out of the atmosphere by grief.

And today across the nation we re-create that 'perfect stillness' in 'reverent remembrance'.

But this soundlessness echoes another silence – the silence of God, both then and now. A disconcerting stillness that confirms atheists in their disbelief and can dent the faith of believers. It's the same silence that descended like darkness around Jesus when in the throes of his own violent death he pleaded with God, "Why have you forsaken me?". And heaven was silent.

But what sound would God make? And if he did cry out who would be able to stand the sound of his wailing? I doubt that anyone who heard such a terrifying noise could live beyond that moment.

Yet in our common silence today we have the chance to be mindful of all who, either dead or alive, bear the scars of battle. Such concentrated thoughts will make our stillness all the louder on this Armistice Day.

The Right Reverend James Jones