

***+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.***

Where are the heroes and icons of the world to be found today? Where do we even start to look? In the past people looked to great leaders of nations, monarchs, generals, powerful people who made a real difference to the lives of those they touched. Such people seem to be rarer these days, or perhaps it is just that qualities once esteemed have been overlooked for lesser things, more immediate and gratifying things in people that satisfy in the short term but fail to be enduring.

Our contemporary society suffers from a lack of genuine heroes. The things that made heroes heroic in former generations are less easily defined now than then. Society is diverse and complex. Battles are no longer necessarily considered great anymore. Attributes of physical strength don't equate to greatness these days unless it's in a sporting arena. Courageous journeys and epic adventures are hard to find in a world which has been thoroughly explored and upon which every square centimetre has been mapped.

It is less of a life-threatening adventure when one is equipped with a satellite connected mobile phone. Foolish, is the description applied to those who underprepared take on arduous trips only to fall short and call in navy or army for rescue.

Yet it seems a part of human nature to look for and name heroes, those who do things others do not have the courage to do, those who stand out among others, to whom people look for inspiration and encouragement. Sport has long had its heroes. These are the ones who stick around for a long time and excel above others in their field. People respond to the encouragement to call a person a hero who makes their mark, who stands out from others by way of skill, behind whom ordinary folk vicariously live out their dreams.

There are heroes on TV – think about the old Charlton Heston movies, Ben Hur, the Moses movie. Remember John Wayne and how he used to strut about.

Through people like these and the characters they bring to life in movies we live out dreams of adventure and romance.

So, what makes a person a hero? What transforms an ordinary man or woman into someone else, someone who is virtually revered?

In the ancient world of Greeks and Romans people looked back on an age of Heroes. It followed the golden age where gods walked side by side among human beings, when human beings were valiant and beautiful, well worthy of the company of gods. Following the fall – and remember that every culture and religion has experienced a fall from grace, the gods removed themselves from the mortal world and the age of Heroes began. Heroes were of the ilk of the great Ajax or Heracles, people barely lower than the gods. Heroes of this age were extraordinary fighters in battle. They performed magnificent feats of endurance and strength. Ajax bore the weight of the world upon his shoulders, Heracles underwent the seven great tests of worth. This was the age of the Trojan war, of heroes like Achilles, Odysseus and Agamemnon. Later ages of people looked back at their heroes, immortalised them in story and song, and even today we remember their exploits.

Throughout history heroes were always a warrior and strong person. Heroes had great physical attributes, excellent qualities. Always were they honest, they took the long road, they fought the good fight.

People today crave heroes. Sometimes people who simply cannot live up to expectations are called heroes. This is especially this case with those who suddenly find fame, like sports stars, musicians, and actors. But ordinary people can become heroes, that is part of the dream that others live out through their deeds. Some have heroism thrust upon them and it is drawn out by the situations of harshness and extremity in which they must function.

Think about the ANZACs, the service men and women who left home and family and went to war. Today is Anzac Day. The images of war and conflict, of

deprivation and mateship are given to us again, lest we forget. Anzac Day has become something powerful within Australian culture and society. Australians certainly have not forgotten the sacrifice – they have immortalised it. Nobody is going to Anzac Cove in Turkey this year, or perhaps for some time to come. But that journey of Australians has become a pilgrimage. Many young people especially who make the journey are deeply moved. People, Australians, are claiming something. They want their heroes, and in the experience of the Anzacs, most poignantly in the Anzacs of WWI, those who were torn to pieces in Gallipoli, the Somme, Flanders, Pozieres, and Villers Bretonneux are heroes to be found.

It doesn't matter whether a soldier was killed without firing a shot, or whether he died from dysentery in a fetid tent, or whether he saved fifty of his mates by shooting out a hole of enemy soldiers, himself being killed in the act. What matters to us today is that they were there, that they served their country, forging for us their descendants an identity, something we can claim as ours. They are our heroes.

Today we remember the ultimate hero, the hero who, like the gaunt, hungry and disease-ridden Anzacs who survived WWI, doesn't fit the traditional profile of warrior of supreme physical strength and dynamic ability with weapon and hands. This hero upset people in charge, he thrust away from him the claim to fame and popularity amongst the masses. He didn't seek to be a hero. He came only to do his Father's work. He was put to death in an inglorious way, at the side of criminals, and after the discovery of his empty tomb his followers were deserting him.

Is this a hero? Is this one whom people can live out their dreams and visions of adventure and heroism? Jesus is the counter hero in a way. He does not seek fame through his exploits, only the accomplishment of God's will. He is no warrior or man of great strength – except that he bore the weight of the world's sins, a far heavier burden than Ajax carried on his shoulders, and he is

the conqueror of all evil, before whom demons stoop and flee. And he comes, risen from the dead, showing that even death, the great equaliser of all people, hero or not, cannot keep him down.

It is human nature to keep looking for and making heroes. Through heroes, ordinary folk are taken to new heights. We make their exploits into something far greater than the original event because that is the way we make heroes. We make glory out of dirt and pain and disaster. That was the reality of WWI for the soldiers and the nurses who served. That was the reality for Jesus through his struggles, his suffering, and the disaster of his death. Yet heroes survive these things, even if they die. The Anzacs live on. Jesus, we know lives on, in the most supreme representation of hero. May people not take his sacrifice for granted and look to mortal beings instead as ultimate hero. Jesus will endure far longer than anyone or anything else. So let us acknowledge the heroes of this world, but let us not forgo the greatest hero, our Lord and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.