

Remembrance Day Address 2017

By Nikita Papastamatis

Good Morning Mr Casey, Distinguished guests, Staff and students. 99 years ago the guns finally fell silent on the Western Front. Four years of brutal and costly warfare came to an end. Mass celebrations spontaneously broke out around the world. However the true cost of war had never been more evident.

As was mentioned, in 2016 I was given the privilege by the NSW Government to travel over to France and Belgium for 12 days. Here I traced the steps of the Anzacs who fought there 100 years ago. This experience left me forever changed. On a particular day I recall visiting 8 commonwealth war cemeteries, on this day I visited the resting place of some 30,000 men and women of which approximately half were unnamed graves. To think for each Marble headstone I saw, there was a family, friends and a community left behind never to see this person again. For it was at this moment I realised the true cost of war and how important acts of remembrance are to ensuring the legacy of these men and women is never forgotten.

You do not need to travel to battlefields on government scholarships to be able to fully participate in an act of remembrance. Believe it or not, there have been acts of remembrance occurring all around us since our first day at St Pius. Did you notice, when you walked in through the foyer this morning, the Honour board on the right wall which lists the names of 110 ex-students who fought in the military. When we see the Australian flag flying on the flagpole to your left, do you know the story of Jacob De Sisto, the person it is dedicated to? When you look to the pine tree directly next to the flagpole, do you know the significance it has to our school.

That pine tree was gifted to us by the Commonwealth government in conjunction with the Australia War Memorial. We were selected, along with a small number of schools to grow a lone pine seedling which has become the fully grown tree we see today. The battle of Lone pine was one of the most famous assaults of the Gallipoli campaign. In the late afternoon of 6th of August 1915 Australian forces went up against entrenched Turkish positions. To the Australians Victory the main Turkish trench was taken within 20 minutes of the initial charge, however 4 days of fighting continued which resulted in some 2,000 Australian casualties. This Lone Pine Tree is dedicated to all ex-students of the college who have served in the armed forces.

You can see now that small acts of remembrance are occurring all the time around us. Now that you know these, I encourage you to read the plaque that it next to the lone pine tree. I encourage you to choose a name off the honour board and discover the truly courageous story of a man who was once a proud Pius boy, like you are today. I especially encourage you to research the significance of Jacob De Sisto and discover his story. Although these may seem insignificant acts of remembrance to you, they all keep the spirit of these men and women alive within a forever changing society today.

Each service man and women came from different walks of life, however they shared these three fundamental qualities.

Courage

Endurance

Mateship

Courage. When we say someone possesses courage we often would label them as being brave. It is impossible for us to know the amount of courage it would have taken a soldier to be able to go over the top of the trenches and charge into the line of fire from Machine guns. Many questioned why the soldiers continued to do such task, well it was because they knew that their small effort on that day was to total a much greater cause. So how can we be courageous in our lives today? At times this will require a step into the unknown, a place where we are not comfortable. You must use your inner courage to be able to complete the task at hand and realise the greater cause it is for. Sticking up for someone who is being bullied, helping someone out of good will, taking an active stance against injustice in society. These are all ways to challenge ourselves in a positive way.

Endurance. The ability to withstand hardship or adversity is known as endurance. Sergeant Tom Derrick in the Kokoda campaign, showed endurance when he and his unit were trying to take the enemy at Sattelback. Without waiting for permission, he charged into the action with his platoon. Tom scrambled ahead of his men, scaling a cliff face that would challenge even a professional climber and, hurling grenades, single-handedly destroying an enemy post. His friends were captured, so Tom charge on, through the pouring rain, throwing more grenades, rescuing his men and taking Sattelback. He did not give up, even in such difficult conditions. There are times in our lives when we will often feel like giving up because it gets too hard; exams, training, learning new ideas. Struggling means you are growing and improving, so remember the endurance of Tom Derrick, and don't give up.

Mateship. This word has become perpetually associated the Anzac legend however it is important to note that this loyalty and friendship was not just an exclusive Australian concept. On Christmas Eve of 1914, some 5 months into war, a very significant glimpse of mateship was shown. On this night many German and British troops sang Christmas carols to each other across the lines. At the first light of dawn on Christmas Day, some German Soldiers emerged from their trenches and approached the allies yelling "Merry Christmas." At first the Allies thought this was a trick, but seeing the Germans as unarmed they climbed out of their trenches and joined them in no man's land. Gifts of cigarettes were exchanged, photographs taken and even an impromptu game of football took place. To think these men who were meant to be mortal enemies were able to put this aside to celebrate Christmas day is an inspirational thought. This event highlights to us that even in the most unsuspecting of places, mateship can still flourish.

Lest we forget the Courage, Endurance and Mateship for it is truly what we are remembering today. We are the new torch bearers of this legacy which has been kept alive for the last 100 years. It is now our turn to ensure that these men and women are never just left the history textbooks, but rather their qualities and spirit should be found within all aspects of our world today. Be courageous in your works, be able to endure and overcome tough situation and allow mateship to flourish in the most unsuspecting of places.

Thank You.