

St George's College Remembrance Day Service – 9 November 2018

“Written in the Georgian magazine 100 years ago, there is one word describing Gilbert Nagle’s death that stands out. That word is sacrifice.

Sacrifice – ‘the act of giving up something valuable to you for the sake of something else regarded as more important.’ Only yesterday on our trip to Brookwood Military Cemetery with some Second Year students, I read one of their comments which said ‘We remember and will never forget your sacrifice.’

But Sacrifice isn’t something we talk about much these days, other than perhaps in faith based settings when Jesus and his unique, victorious sacrifice for us is honoured. Although throughout history sacrifice has often been seen as one of the most noble things a human being can do, it’s kind of gone out of favour a bit now. It is interesting that when I ask students in the Third Year if they would have volunteered to fight in the First World War the vast majority would not be willing to sacrifice their lives, limbs or mental health for that war or indeed any other. You’ve all studied it by now and I don’t blame them, do you?

But I wonder if our dislike of sacrifice goes a bit further than war? Popular thinking could lead us to believe that any form of sacrifice goes against our individual right to happiness. Why should you sacrifice anything for anyone else? You can have everything you want.

There is a current theory in the field of psychology called the ‘foolishness of sacrifice’. The idea is that giving of your time, money or talents in a way that costs you is not beneficial for you or anyone else and the way to fulfilment is to please yourself and do what you feel like doing.

And so perhaps we are in danger of adopting the idea that 'self' is the most valuable thing. The aim in life is 'self-sufficiency' build your 'self-esteem' look at my 'selfie', express yourself, there's even a magazine called **Self**. Now of course we all have a self and we are all unique and infinitely precious individuals; caring for self is a part of life but is consistently focusing on ourselves as the number one priority in a **self-centred** way the path to happiness?

I spoke to the Lower Years about how hard it is for young people to remember and engage with Remembrance Day. Perhaps this is one reason why? Our current society values 'self' more than 'sacrifice'. The concept of laying down anything for anyone else, let alone one's life is now so alien to us in our 'me, myself and I' world that we just can't empathise with the 1.1 million British and Colonial soldiers who died in the First World War, or the millions who have died in conflicts during the last one hundred years as we have been reminded.

But what if, even in the new era of the 21st century and in Generations X, Y and Z the concept of sacrifice should not just be remembered or respected but reinvigorated? What if our Georgian Josephite principles and the teachings of Jesus are right and there is value in personal sacrifice, not just in war but in friendships, relationships, marriages, businesses, even academic exam results.

As you grow and make your own way in the world each one of you will have to decide for yourself the balance between self and sacrifice in your own life. I'm certainly not advocating for future wars to give you this opportunity, but maybe we can be inspired by those who chose to make the ultimate sacrifice in war. I read an inscription at the Cemetery yesterday. It was an extract from a letter a soldier had written to his Mum during World War Two and

then she chose to use it on his grave. It read "Mother, I've weighed the risks, which I prefer to living in a world dominated by Nazis". Bill.

Today as we complete our service, or next week as you listen to music, the poetry recital or the History lecture organised for this special anniversary, as Georgians we will remember the sacrifice that our school forebears made, that our family members made, that our town's folk made, that our nations made and see their actions as something to be honoured. But I hope we are also challenged by them, regardless of our views on wars or religion, to in our own small way consider the value of sacrifice in our own lives when we have decisions and choices to make. May we also think of others as well as ourselves."

Matthew Barham, Head of History and Politics