

**ANZAC Day
St Leo's College
25 April 2025**

Ecclesiasticus 44:8-15

Psalm 71

Revelation 21:1-7

John 12:23-28

Fr Frank Brennan SJ

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/frank-brennan-6/st-leos-anzac-day>

Today we mark the 110th anniversary of the day on which Australians and New Zealanders landed in the stillness of the early dawn on the Turkish shoreline wanting to assist with the Allies' advance on Constantinople, now Istanbul, the day on which the Turks commenced a successful, eight month campaign to defend their homeland against the assault.

Nineteen years after the ANZAC landings, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Founder and first President of the modern Republic of Turkey, who had been Commander in Chief of the Turkish forces in Gallipoli, graciously responded to an Australian journalist's request and wrote, 'The landing at Gallipoli on April 25, 1915, and the fighting which took place on the peninsula will never be forgotten. They showed to the world the heroism of all those who shed their blood there. How heartrending for their nations were the losses that this struggle caused.' 110 years on from the fateful landing, we gather in peace, espousing the virtues of all who fought and daring to pray together for peace and reconciliation between us and amongst all peoples. We gather together helping each other to repair the heartrending and to prosper as best we can from the tragic, irreparable losses.

We remember the 130,000 who were killed on that blood-soaked peninsula during the Gallipoli campaign, and the other quarter of a million who were wounded. 110 years on, we pray not just for the 44,000 Allies who died, but also for the 86,000 Turks who perished in their trenches opposite them. Being ANZAC Day, we particularly call to mind the 8709 Australians and 2779 Kiwis who died. A handful at the time were honoured by name for particular military feats, *'but of others there is no memory; they have perished as though they had never existed; but these also were godly men, whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten; their descendants stand by the covenants; and their glory will never be blotted out'*. (Ecclesiasticus 44:8-14)

We recall the innocence of the soldiers – many aged the same as many of you here at St Leo's – and the human values that they embodied of courage and mateship. We recall too the reality, routine and relentlessness of their fighting, their sufferings, and their deaths. We also recall the idealism, the hope, and perhaps even the naivety of empire which motivated and sustained them and those who sent them to battle. The ANZACs had sailed from Albany in Western Australia on All Saints Day, 1 November 1914. They waited in Egypt and then joined the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force of 75,000. They landed early morning, and in the wrong place. Because of navigational errors the ANZACs landed about 2 km north of the intended site. Instead of a flat stretch of coastline, the boats carrying the 1500 men who would make the first landing came ashore at what is now named appropriately Anzac Cove, a narrow beach overlooked by steep hills and ridgelines. Thus began an eight month campaign of combat in muddled trenches infested by lice, swarmed by flies, and putrified by faeces.

Back home, their political masters were sustained both by the pride of selfless colonial service to empire and by the hope of imminent military success. At 3pm on 29 April 1915, Australian Prime Minister Andrew Fisher rose in the House of Representatives and proudly declared:

Some days ago the Australian War Expeditionary Forces were transferred from Egypt to the Dardanelles. They have since landed, and have been in action on the Gallipoli Peninsula. News reaches us that the action is proceeding satisfactorily. I am pleased to be able to read the following cablegram received to-day from the Secretary of State for the Colonies: —

'His Majesty's Government desire me to offer you their warmest congratulations on the splendid gallantry and magnificent achievement of your contingent in the successful progress of the operations at the Dardanelles.'

To this the following reply has been despatched through His Excellency the Governor-General: —

'The Government and people of Australia are deeply gratified to learn that their troops have won distinction in their first encounter with the enemy. We are confident that they will carry the King's colours to further victory.'¹

¹ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 29 April 1915, p. 2724

Next day Fisher read to the House a telegram from King George dated 29 April 1915:

I heartily congratulate you upon the splendid conduct and bravery displayed by the Australian troops in the operations at the Dardanelles, who have indeed proved themselves worthy sons of the Empire.²

On 5 May 1915, ten days after the Gallipoli landing, Australian members of parliament were agitated that the Melbourne press were carrying details of New Zealand casualties but there were still no public details available of Australian casualties. A question was put to the Assistant Minister for Defence:

In view of the many messages of congratulation that we have received regarding the bravery of our troops in action in the Dardanelle, is the Assistant Minister of Defence in a position to tell the House with what result the bravery of our men has been attended?

The answer was a simple, haunting three words: *I am not*.³

Gradually, the political masters and then the people became apprised of the more gruesome reality on the other side of the globe. 110 years on, we balance the idealism of service to empire, the reality of death in the trenches, and the prospect of reconciliation with former enemies in scales which only grace and forgiveness can hold. *'Their bodies are buried in peace, but their names live on generation after generation. The assembly declares their wisdom, and the congregation proclaims their praise'*. (Ecclesiasticus 44:14-15)

Over the generations, we have reached out across those trenches that divided us. We have embraced a more sustaining myth, a more noble ideal: the fraternity of all peoples, the dignity of our shared humanity. We have appropriated the words attributed to Atatürk at the 1934 dawn service: 'There is no difference between the Johnnies and Mehments to us where they lie side by side in this country of ours....After having lost their lives on this land they are now our sons as well.'

At this morning's Dawn Service at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, Prime Minister Albanese said: 'Let us once more dedicate ourselves to the ideals for which they died. As the dawn is even now about to pierce the night, so let their memory inspire us to work for the coming new light into the dark places of the world.'

² *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 30 April 1915, p. 2814

³ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 5 May 1915, p. 2832

Despite the instability and the intractable conflicts in our world today, we dare to gather in prayer dreaming of '*a new heaven and a new earth*' in which the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob '*will wipe every tear from their eyes*' so that '*mourning and crying and pain will be no more*'. (Revelation 21:4) We hear the word of Revelation proclaimed to all people of good will, to all peacemakers including those who have fought, those who are fighting, and those who will fight so that there might be no more war: '*I will be their God and they will be my children*'. (Revelation 21:7)

Today, lest we forget.

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

May you Leonians return to campus carrying and sharing the memories of those who encountered each other for the first time across trenches 110 years ago, committing yourselves afresh to transforming our heartrending and our losses into heartmending and tangible dividends of peace for our world. Remember that *unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest.* (John 12:24)

Let us pray:

Lord Our God, on this day, 110 years ago, the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, at Gallipoli, made immortal the name of Anzac and established an imperishable tradition of selfless service, of devotion to duty, and of fighting for all that is best in human relationships.

O Lord, we who are gathered here today at St Leo's College remember with gratitude the men and women who have given, and are still giving all that is theirs to give, in order that the world may be a nobler place in which to live.

And with them, Lord, we remember those left behind to bear the sorrow of their loss.

We dedicate ourselves to taking up the burdens of the fallen and, with the same high courage and steadfastness with which they went into battle, to setting our hands to the tasks they left unfinished. Lord, we dedicate ourselves to the service of the ideals for which they died. With your help, O God, might we give our utmost to make the world what they would have wished it to be, a better and happier place for all of its people, through whatever means are open to us.

We make this prayer through Christ Our Lord. Amen.