

God Give Them Peace

by janus

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This story represents my beliefs in a diverse community, and I want to be clear that I also support your beliefs for they are also meaningful. This is simply one instance of meaning for me.

What Shall We Pray?

Chapter 1 of 1

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It was Remembrance Day. Though it was meant to be a Muggle holiday, Severus wished to celebrate, for he had a great deal to remember. He knew some Muggles went to the cenotaph with its wreaths and bugles, with the bright-faced boys with flags, and with the old men still bravely defying wheelchairs. He remembered one year before he had started school his father had taken him to their local ceremony. There were so few men from the first war now ... almost none.

The first war. Severus had his own dead, his own heroes. He had those he had venerated in person in his own youth. His war had not been the first war, though they said so now. No, the first had been Gellert's war. And then there had been a second war and then a third.

Where would he go to remember his dead? He did not want to simply sit alone in his room thinking of them. He wanted more: to partake in this national holiday ... *holy* day. Not the cenotaph. The Muggles would stare at his robes, at his closed face. A church, darker, quiet. Here he would be left to his thoughts; he could kneel to higher things beneath the windows redolent with centuries of meaning, yet there would be some formal solemnity. He took a book and hymn sheet from a small stack at the back of the church and slid into a rear pew.

What shall we pray for those who died,

those on whose deaths our lives relied?

Silenced by war but not denied,

God give them peace.

Severus looked at the music as the voices of the parishioners arose before him. He sang along a fraction of a beat behind so he could follow the tune. *What shall we pray for those who died...* This was appropriate for Remembrance day. So many dead. *Silenced by war but not denied.* Yes. They were dead, and though he had needed at times to deny his... his love to the powers that had been, he had never denied it to himself, had never let go of his dead. *God give them peace.*

What shall we pray for those who mourn

friendships and love, their fruit unborn?

Though years have passed, hearts still are torn;

God give them peace.

He felt good. He felt as if he were adding his heart to those of these people about him with their will to honour the past in order to uphold the future. *What shall we pray for those who mourn: friendships and love, their fruit unborn?* Well, this was for him as well. Perhaps he could allow himself this kindness. Perhaps those about him had lost uncles, grandparents, even great-grandparents in the Muggle wars. He could think of them as well. He smiled. This had been a good choice on this day. He focused his mind on his dead and on his lost ones for good measure ... those who had lost their hearts as surely as the others had lost their lives. The song would not last forever.

Yes, it still hurt, thinking of those young faces full of misplaced idealism and the older faces with their newly reborn hope and their harder-edged conviction. *Though years had passed, hearts still are torn. God give them peace.* And he felt a small measure of real, tangible peace steal into his heart, aided by the depth of years of compassion still present in the very air of the church surrounding him.

What shall we pray for those who live,

tied to a past they can't forgive,

haunted by terrors they relive?

God give them peace.

Then everything stilled as to a complete silent stop as Severus stared at the next words and looked around at the parishioners in case they knew him. Could they somehow tell the words were for him? They were surely not for them. Muggles. What did they know of things so dark they needed forgiveness? These were words for soldiers who fought, injured, and killed. They were words for those who waited dully for action, dire when it came or even shamefully unsurprising. But through the turmoil of his awareness the even tones continued rising and falling with those on his page.

What shall we pray for those who live, tied to a past they can't forgive, haunted by terrors they relive? For he did relive them. And there were some days when he knew as easily as remembering first-year Potions that forgiveness was always possible and open to him and to every other soldier of all time. But some days he could forgive neither one side nor the other, nor himself for serving them. On the worst days he could forgive no one and dared not even say *The Lord's Prayer*. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." At these times such a prayer would doom him. And he certainly did not forgive anyone who who walked in naivety or ignorance while the world unravelled around them. *God give them peace.* And yet they offered him this. They offered *him* peace. Thank you.

What shall we pray for those who know

nothing of war, and cannot show

grief or regret for friend or foe?

God give them peace.

And then it was their turn. If they could give him grace, he could also give them grace. At least for today. Because he knew that if he sat among them, sooner or later they would talk of their small personal troubles, their trivial possessions, their daily processes, and their inertia. And the larger horrors of his life would eclipse them so that if he wished to leave them intact, all he could do would be to disappear as inconspicuously as possible. *What shall we pray for those who know nothing of war...*

...and cannot show grief or regret for friend or foe? What did they know of the fact that each side saw itself composed of friends and knew itself to be clear and true, no matter how misguided, no matter what they did for 'the greater good'?

He looked again at the first verse. *those on whose deaths our lives relied?* It did not say 'lives' but 'deaths.' And that meant two things. It was not only one's comrades who had sacrificed themselves in battle or those tortured to death for keeping one secret. Friends. There were also those of the other side that had been killed by one's actions, and by those of one's comrades in order that they should not suffer or be killed themselves. Foes. Friends and foes on whose deaths his life had relied. Each had done terrible things; each had suffered monstrously. And Severus felt for every one. What did those who knew nothing of war understand of the reality? He forgave those that broke as much as his heart ached and mourned for those who died. Both sides had truths, heroes, and martyrs, as well as soldiers who could not forgive themselves and who had died with that burden. Severus forgave them today.

People, unknowing, believed as they were told to believe and serenely trusted their conviction. How could they, unknowing, understand anything of what it was to have Magic, to fight for it, and to lose? How could they understand the loss of whole lives of wonder when any single glittering shard would have left them to wander the world senseless in hope of another glimpse? His heart was breaking for so much more. How could they understand that each side of a war holds souls of radiant beauty? They had been taught otherwise. And he knew how their faces would close to him should they guess any inkling of this single fact with which he lived every day of his life.

These were the ones Severus could not accept or understand: the ones who threw him into fear because they were not real yet. Who knew what they might think or say or do? Ah, but his reaction must not be avoidance but peace. *God give them peace.* Nevertheless.

Did they know what they sang? But perhaps it did not matter. God give them peace. Each and every one. And he felt he inhaled a breath of kinship. Mutual peace.

What shall we pray for those who fear

war, in some guise, may reappear

looking attractive and sincere?

God give them peace.

And there was the crux of it in the next verse. People never believed that they, even they, should be mistaken. They believed in war ... people on either side believed ... with banners and symbols, passwords, and signs. They believed themselves an invincible inevitable force for evolution, creating the future. And in between they believed their wars had been good and they believed in peace. But Severus knew. Momentum could change peace to war in a moment. Any idea, carried in procession with swords and drums, would lead to death, prison, and sacrifice for the innocent. Any such idea would lead to corrupt struggles for power. The ideas did not matter in such a march of war. It was always the procession that determined right and wrong, good and evil. The procession and the swords.

Severus' fingers fumbled for the hinged kneeler and pulled it down gently, careful lest it clunk to the wooden floor. He knelt; those before him stood as they sang. He was not kneeling to his lost ones but kneeling for them. It was a prayer.

He thought of Regulus, bright and loyal. He had always been easily and eagerly 'ready, willing, and able,' as they used to say. But it had been tempered with gentleness and an equally easy interest in everyone and everything about him. He had been proud of his friends, his affiliations, and even of himself. It had been fond and infectious.

Severus thought of Rabastan, who had lost himself if not his body. He remembered him as he had been: big, warm, and comforting with his dog, his plants, and his antiques comprising his quiet life away from heady war. He had always showed concern for Severus. He thought sadly of Rabastan's love of his brother and his instinct to protect him on the awful night of his arrest.

He thought of Evan, with his quick comradely grin, so perfectly self-assured and poised that he amused himself by emulating those less so. He had laughed and crinkled his eyes at Severus' seriousness. He had surprised even himself with his adaptability and adeptness.

Severus thought of Dolohov leaning forward to him over the table, explaining some new nuance of a discovery. Those had been precious memories, when the older man was excited over a new idea and shared the best he had, respectfully, with Severus.

All these had believed surely, naturally, and completely. Their part in the war, their side, their cause, and their comrades had been life and reason. They had debated tactics, aspects, and importances. Yet the cause itself seemed sound and shining. They had all been enveloped, not captured but captivated, genuinely committed and that with gladness. They had all believed themselves responsible for the birth of a new and better world. And it could happen again that others would believe the same of their folly. It would happen again. Again and again and again through all history. *What shall we pray for those who fear: war, in some guise, may reappear, looking attractive and sincere?*

Severus thought of Regulus dead... somewhere, killed nameless... somewhere. He thought of Rabastan, his feet hesitating after prison with each step, afraid of the sky. He thought of Evan, killed not as he ran but as he fought, eyes reflecting agony and Dark magic from an unforgivable curse thrown by an Auror. He thought of Dolohov pouring tea for his owl, and the card he had sent Severus marred by torn lace and smeared with the man's own blood.

Severus thought of himself, knees protected by the padded leather, the hardwood of the pew indenting his arm to the bone as he leant too heavily against it with the intensity of his thought. This was real. The people around him were real. Yes, it would happen again. And perhaps there would always be survivors, and there would always be outsiders who could grasp some of their feeling and knowledge. Yes. The parishioners sang. *God give them peace.* They sang and prayed for him and for his dead.

"And please, for the future: with knowledge of the past, with knowledge that there are always true souls on both sides, let me know better what is best. Let me know how to offer peace of heart." Severus prayed. Severus sang.

God give us peace, and more than this,

show us the path where justice is;

and let us never be remiss

working for peace that lasts.