HOMILY REFLECTION ON THE START OF WORLD WAR ONE, August 2014

Pax Christi member Jan Royan from Hallam Diocese shared this Homily from Fr Andy Graydon, his last Homily in St Mary Magdalene Parish, Hallam Diocese. Jan says Fr Andy sang the original Pete Seeger refrain *"Gone to graveyards everyone*" and the congregation responded with "*When will we ever learn, when will we ever learn"*. Jan says it was really powerful, a great lament from the whole congregation.

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Given by Fr. Andy Graydon

1   Pete Seeger: Where have all the flowers gone (died January 2014 aged 94). Pete wrote this song in 1955, only the three verses, and then put it on the back burner. In 1960 Joe Hickerson added another couple of verses (Peter Paul and Mary): Where have all the soldiers gone; long time passing; where have all the graveyards gone etc, and then back to the first verse, making it a "circular". The refrain, "when will we ever learn, when will we ever learn" (repeated for emphasis) will be our refrain for this reflection, after I sing "gone to graveyards everyone….." We sing "When will be ever learn, when will we ever learn."

2   A 100 years ago no one would have believed that the start of such events would lead to the most senseless war in history. I mean Austria-Hungary who declared war on 28th July only really wanted to do was to dismember Serbia, where irredentists were stirring up ethnic Serbs in Austrian territory; Russia, which backed Serbia wanted to come to the aid of fellow Eastern Orthodox Slavs, and undo the racial humiliation of losing a war to Japan a decade earlier. Once the fatal tangle of alliances had drawn more countries into the conflict, each one claiming that it was only defending itself against the enemies, spiralling out of control and ended up with 11 million soldiers been killed, almost 10 million civilians, over 21 million wounded. In Britain alone 41,000 men who had one or more limbs amputated. In France there were so many mangled faces that they formed a "National Union of Disfigured men". Our oldest parishioner, Bob Kemp, tells me that there were 480, 000 horses killed in the First World War.
"Gone to graveyards everyone…"

3.   At the Battle of the Somme which began on July first 1916, the most senseless battle in the most senseless war, where 420, 000 British soldiers were killed (60,000 on the first day). There were 200,000 soldiers killed from the French army and 500,000 from the German army. The young suffered terribly: out of every British man aged between 18 – 37, 3 were killed and 6 were wounded.
"Gone to graveyards everyone……"

4.   Most historians agree that this war not only did not make things any better, but in fact made things worse. Some will go as far to say it created the climate for extreme powers to grow in Russia and Germany, thus planting the seeds for the Second World War to happen. By 1918 right-wing Germans were already blaming the country's military setback on the Jews. Harry Patch, the last surviving veteran

of the First World War, said, "It was not even worth one life." "Gone to graveyards everyone…………"

5.　　It was supposed to be the war to end all wars, but since then we have had the Second World War, which claimed 60 million lives (whole of Britain wiped out); over 2 half million in the Korean War;　up to about 2 million in the Vietnam war; Over half million people were killed in the War in Iraq. The killing still goes on in Syria, Ukraine, and parts of Africa; the Arab-Israeli war seems to go on forever! "Gone to graveyards everyone.."

6.　　Today is the 69th anniversary on the dropping of the hydrogen bomb on Hiroshima 8.02am killing over 166,000 people instantly. More died later to the effects of radiation. Ironic that they chose to drop the bomb on the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, the day Jesus showed his glory to his disciples and gave them hope. "Gone to graveyards everyone…….."

7.　　We keep needing to remind ourselves, because we do not seem to learn at all. But just what is it that we are commemorating today? Yes, we should remember our dead, but there is a vast difference between honouring the memory of a family member and honouring the cause for which that family member died. Over the next four years every leading country in North America and Europe will be sprucing up their war museums in these coming years, with their tanks and planes, machine guns, artillery equipment, all for killing, of course, but who will be highlighting those who fought for peace, many of who were imprisoned for their opposition. In Britain there were many anti-war activists. 20,000 British men of military age refused conscription, 6,000 of them went to prison for refusing to work in munitions factories, one of them was the eminent philosopher Bertrand Russell, who said: *"This war is trivial, despite its vastness. There is no great principle at stake, no great human purpose involved on either side. The English and the French say that they are fighting for democracy, but they do not want their words to be heard in Petrograd or Calcutta."*

8.　　Yes, we must remember our dead, but let us not forget those men and women who fought for peace: they deserve monuments as great as those for any general.