



Holocaust Memorial Day compels us to confront the reality of our capacity to commit evil against one another. It is also a searing indictment of our collusion in the evil of others through our silence.

The theme for this year's Holocaust Memorial Day is Don't Stand by. It's a call not just to remember, but to act. But in order to act, we must remember. Remembering enables us to see that the Holocaust did not happen suddenly and it did not happen through the acts of a few. It happened through the silent collaboration of the many.

It's never been acceptable to claim that we don't know because we can't see. We cannot walk on by on the other side oblivious to the needs of our neighbours.

In the world we inhabit, the searchlight of an active media illuminates the dark recesses of the caricature, simplistic criticism and ridicule that leads inexorably to the dehumanising and degrading treatment of others. History shows clearly that, unopposed, this can lead to violent persecution and genocide.

But we're not called to be passive observers and silent accomplices to discrimination.

We can take responsibility ourselves. Firstly, we need to admit our own culpability in not standing up for others. On this poignant day of reflection, let's confess our own unwillingness to say and do what is right because we are fearful of what others might think of us.

Courage does not mean fearlessness, but faithfulness when fearful.

God calls us to do the right thing, even if we are in a minority of one. Jesus himself said: Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We must also take responsibility for our children. In our homes and in our schools, we must encourage young people to stand up and to speak out against the everyday abuses of prejudice and discrimination in the street and the playground. Our syllabuses and assemblies should highlight the virtues of courage and faithfulness in those who have led by example historically and in our scriptures. Holocaust Memorial Day should be marked in every school in this country.

Finally, we must take responsibility for the substance of public discourse. Through social media and 24-hour news coverage, we have never had so much opportunity to stand up and speak out against those who would diminish others through caricature and cheap political point scoring.

We all need to show true leadership and integrity when given the power to shape the opinions of others. It's incumbent upon those who take political office or those who have influence in the media, to speak up for the defenceless and the marginalised, and not to pander to popular prejudice.

Perhaps the most fitting tribute we can pay to those who died during the Holocaust is not to stand by silently colluding in the persecution, abuse and slaughter of others. The memory of the Holocaust dead cries out for our active defence of those who are vulnerable throughout the world, irrespective of their background or beliefs.

Don't stand by. Speak up, speak out and let us not bear false witness through our silence and inaction

3 min read

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**Source URL:** <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/archbishop-justins-message-holocaust-memorial-day>