



# Christmas Homily 2014

On the side of a windswept field in Ploegsteert (pronounced “plug-steert”), Belgium, stands a simple wooden cross that marks a most unique event that took place 100 years ago today. For it was on this day in 1914 that history found German and British enemies in trenches facing each other ready to do battle and destroy each other.

But it was Christmas day and neither group were able to push that aside. The miracle that was about to happen began with the German soldiers who started singing Silent Night. Some in the British trench immediately recognized the melody and started singing in English the words to Silent Night.

One of the British soldiers took courage and seized the moment. Despite warnings from his fellow soldiers, he climbed out of the trench with his hands held high showing that he was carrying no gun. The German soldiers were ready to shoot back when one of them followed the lead and despite protests from the others jumped out of the trench and began to move toward the British soldier with his hands also held high. Soon other soldiers from both sides joined the single individuals who led the way.

When the two soldiers met in the middle of the field they were both frightened. The British soldier extended his hand said: “My name is Jim.” The German soldier responded by extending his hand and saying, “My name is Otto.” Jim wish Otto a Merry Christ and so began a most unusual Christmas truce. The other soldiers followed the example of Jim and Otto as they started to exchange their names and pictures of the families they had left back home. A soccer game began as soldiers forgot that they were enemies who had now become friends. They abandoned the evils of war and replaced them with an experience of peace and mutual joy.

This merriment continued for hours as soldiers from each side learned to not only play together but to share whatever meager supplies they possessed. They laughed together and forgot they were enemies.

Sadly all of this ended when they heard the distant sounds of soldiers shooting at each other. The gunshots called them back to their job as soldiers waging war. Reluctantly they returned to their trenches and looked sadly as they left their new-found friends and their experience of Christmas peace.

Today is Christmas. Can there be a more beautiful day in the year? Today will be filled with prayer and festivity, with merriment and the love of family. Today we remember that Christ came to be one with us, to stand by us in moments that are painful, and to lead us to the gift of peace. A group of soldiers discovered the meaning of this day as the Spirit of Christmas led them out of their trenches and into the discovery that we don’t have to live our lives at war with each other. I pray that we may make that same discovery. I also pray that when this day is over, the realities of our day-to-day existence do not extinguish our search for peace but only become an opportunity to live the message of Christmas in every moment and in every action of our lives. May God bless us all this Christmas Day!