

# realpeople

the gospel in everyday language



**In today's readings:**

Laws of love. Ex 22:20-26  
The Christian life is a whole new world. 1 Thes 1:5-10  
The two great commandments: Love God and love your neighbour. Mt 22:34-40

**Next week:** A reminder to live what we preach.

Mal 1:14-2:2,8-10;  
1 Thes 2:7-9,13; Mt 23:1-12

## In a nutshell

Today's Gospel expounds two great commandments: love of God and neighbour. No law, no ritual, no intellectual prowess, no sophisticated program can ever supersede the call to love which is at the heart of the gospel message. This is the answer Jesus gives to those who try to trap him with their politics and religious rhetoric.



*Stories of heroic love from the memories of an Italian man who survived World War II:*

## The day the war ended

Italy. 1945. I was seventeen years old. There was fighting between the Americans and Germans right outside our village. It was to be the last day of the war in Italy, but we did not know that at the time.

About ten German soldiers stormed our farmhouses. A farmer had shot one of their men. They grabbed a dozen people, including my sister, and lined them up against a wall outside. I rushed out and signalled to the soldiers to let me take my sister's place, which they allowed. I had my back against the wall as the soldiers raised their rifles. Strangely, I remember their faces. They were the faces of desperate, exhausted, hungry, dazed boys, about 16 or 17 years old. I wasn't praying. I was trying to remember the German I had learnt at school. I began talking to the officer, saying we hadn't shot at the Germans, that we had nothing to do with the war. Amidst all the chaos,

the officer seemed surprised to hear me talking to him. He thought for a moment, then ordered the soldiers to leave.

Later that evening there was much machine gun fire outside. In the morning all was quiet. There were dead German everywhere. I went to the parish presbytery where there were many wounded Germans. One of them was writing to his wife: 'My dearest, this is going to be my last letter...' He signed it, addressed it and asked me to send it to his home, which I did. I tried to encourage him and the other German soldiers and help them as much as I could. As it turned out, the soldier who gave me the letter survived. He was moved to a military hospital and had his leg amputated. Later I received a letter from his wife, thanking me for helping her husband.

*Love takes courage. Think and pray about it.*

## The day the war ended

(cont'd.)

One day I received a letter from a different German woman asking if I knew about her husband who had also been in the battle in our village. I was able to work out who he was. I remembered that he had terrible wounds to his abdomen - there had been no hope of saving him. He died praying with the parish priest. About a year later his wife came out and I was able to show her his grave. We kept in touch for quite a time. Her husband had been a history teacher and they had a young son.

## Life after the war

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It was through trying to come to terms with the war that I came to a deeper love of God. The futility and horror of the things I had seen affected me deeply. I had also seen acts of courage and kindness. After the war I began meeting with a group of young Catholic men. Together we tried to make sense of so much that seemed senseless. My mother had given me a deep grounding in my faith and soon I was president of the local Young Catholic Men's Association.

One night, I went to a religious lecture being held in another town. The speaker turned out to be a member of a Christian movement called Focolare ('little fireside'). He spoke about their community way of life and their mission to bring God's love, unity and peace to the world.

As I listened I felt a great surge of hope. 'This is life!' I said to myself. I invited the speaker to talk in my town and immediately became an involved and active member. (DZ)

## Think . Talk

Think of a time when you were called to 'love beyond your limits'.



**RealPeople** offers faith reflections from the saints and prophets of everyday life.

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