

## **The Christmas Fixture.**

A few days before Christmas 2014, a memorial was unveiled near Ypres in Belgium. It was cast in bronze, in the form of an exploded shell and an old leather football. The memorial commemorated one of the most remarkable incidents of the Great War. On Christmas Day 1914, a spontaneous truce broke out along the Western Front. Groups of British and German soldiers stopped fighting and met in No-Mans Land; they talked, exchanged gifts and played football; ordinary decent young men, longing for peace and normality and home. But the peace didn't last- orders came from both High Commands "No Fraternisation". Peace was not given a chance, and result was that by Christmas 1918 - millions were dead.

What if ? What if the match had gone to Extra-Time, or What if there had been a Replay ? Now we shall never know.

Every year since 1914, Christmas Day has brought its own kind of truce into our lives: cards are sent, invitations extended, families re-united, friendships renewed and broken bridges mended. And the hand of Love and Forgiveness that God extends to us all through the Birth of Jesus is accepted as people make their way to church, possibly for the first time in a year, or even years. For many sadly, the truce is short-lived. Boxing Day and New Year no sooner come than they go back to their old ways. But, What if? - What if our goodwill for family and each other, for the poor and needy, for the homeless and the marginalised extended beyond the 12 Days of Christmas ?

We couldn't affect the outcome of Christmas 1914 and the dreadful loss of Life during the subsequent 4 years. But we can affect the outcome of Christmas 2018 and the events of the coming year.

The Christmas Fixture is on the calendar once again. What if our Christmas truce was extended this year ? That would ensure that our remembrance was indeed genuine and sincere. There is no High Command instructing us to put away our care and concern with the Christmas tree and the decorations.

On the contrary, God is challenging us to make Goodwill a permanent characteristic of our relationships and our lives, He gives us all the Extra-Time we need, He invites us to a Replay week after week. God sent his Son Jesus into our world as our Saviour to bring Peace. If we don't welcome Him and accept his offer of Love and Forgiveness we shouldn't be surprised if there is no peace in our world.

May the Peace and Love, the Joy and Hope that the Christ-child brings, find a more permanent place in our hearts and homes this Christmas and throughout the coming year.

Father Joe.