

Living testimony

Prayer for the Day

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I have spent much of the last two weeks in the company of some very brave people. They are not brave because they were sent to Nazi death camps, nor even because they survived. They are brave because they have overcome their own fears in order to tell their stories.

This year's public Holocaust Memorial Day is over, but for these people every day is Holocaust Memorial Day. They don't need ceremonies attended by the great and the good to remind them; they need only close their eyes and try not to dream.

It is the rest of us who need the moving testimony from survivors, the footage of the liberation of Belsen; the stories of bravery, of resistance, of the heights to which the human spirit can rise, as well of the depths to which we can sink.

And there's the paradox: these horrors are unspeakable, and yet the survivors must speak. Not everyone can: my own father, may he rest in peace, was one of only two survivors of his family of 14 - but that is as much as he was able to tell me. It is not just lives that were destroyed, but memories too.

It is trite to say that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it - but that does not make it any less true! That is why testimony matters, why we owe the greatest debt to those who have the inner strength to overcome their horror of reviving their memories to share them with us. It is only by reliving their memories that they can steer humanity away from reliving their sufferings.

May those who have the courage to speak, and the countless millions of victims who cannot do so, be always remembered, and though their memory may humanity be spared any repetition of the evil they suffered.