

Good morning, staff, students, and guests. Today, I am honoured to speak with you as we commemorate Remembrance Day. A day dedicated to pausing, reflecting, and expressing gratitude. Each year, on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, we remember those who served and sacrificed for our peace. As a teacher here at John XXIII College and a serving member of the Army Reserve, I am privileged to share a few thoughts and reflections on the meaning of this day.

My role as a rifleman is typically focused on infantry tactics and soldiering skills. Today, however, invites me to look beyond that scope and consider the broader impact of service and the lessons history offers us. There's an old saying: "Those who fail to learn from the past are condemned to repeat it." Today, I hope we can draw some important lessons from this history.

Allow me to start with the origins of Remembrance Day. On this day, 106 years ago, the guns of World War I finally fell silent as the Allies and the Central Powers agreed to an Armistice. This day, originally known as Armistice Day, marks a moment of profound significance.

An armistice is a formal agreement between warring parties to stop fighting. But ending a conflict is only the first step. To ensure that peace lasts, it must be accompanied by forgiveness and dignity for all involved. Unfortunately, after World War I, the harsh treatment of the losing nations led to resentment and unrest, sowing seeds for the next global conflict. This is a vital lesson: peace cannot endure without justice that is restorative rather than punitive.

The importance of restorative justice is something we practice here in our own community. When disagreements arise in the schoolyard, simply stopping the quarrel isn't enough. Both sides must feel that they've reached a fair and understanding resolution, one that helps everyone involved learn and grow.

As we look around the world today, we see conflicts with complex histories that won't be easily resolved. Yet, we can hope that these conflicts, when they end, will be met with grace and respect to avoid repeating past mistakes. Without compassion and understanding, conflict becomes infinite, and cycles of violence persist.

This brings me to a powerful idea about justice. “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind”. Retributive justice has limits; we must find room for forgiveness.

I speak to you today not as an expert but as someone who would be called to serve if our country faces future conflicts. I have not been deployed to a combat zone, and I sincerely hope I never have to be. In reflecting on the possible consequences of war, I think of Albert Einstein, who famously said he did not know what weapons World War III would be fought with, but he knew that World War IV would be fought with sticks and stones. Therefore, our greatest objective is peace.

Some may find it ironic or paradoxical to hear a soldier advocating for peace, but it’s essential to understand that Australia has a Defence Force—not an attack force. Our mission is to protect, not provoke, and to uphold the security, liberty, and prosperity we, as Australians, hold dear. To ensure peace, not pursue conflict. Australian service members have protected our ideals of democracy and freedom since well before Federation, and we do not take these for granted.

Today, we honour those who have paid the ultimate price. We remember that the freedom we cherish has been secured through the service and sacrifice of others. Let us carry their legacy by striving for a world where peace prevails, and the need for such sacrifice diminishes.

I look to the future with optimism because, as a teacher, I have the privilege of working with the next generation of leaders daily. Here at John XXIII College, we aim to prepare our graduates to be people of competence, conscience, and compassion—committed to service and guided by values that uphold peace.

While few of us here can control the handling of international conflicts, we can control how we handle conflict in our own lives. When wronged, have the grace of Jesus to forgive, breaking the cycle of resentment and hostility. Jesus taught us to “love your enemy,” reminding us that the scorned only continue to fight, but the forgiven may find the strength to lay down their arms. This, in essence, is the true spirit of an armistice: creating a moment of peace that allows conflict to end and reconciliation to begin.

Thank you for joining this reflection. May we each commit to fostering peace in our lives and our communities.